

**“Look out Haskell,  
it’s real!”**

**The Making of  
medium cool**

**Paul Cronin**

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**DIALOGUE TRANSCRIPT**

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## Cast of characters

*in alphabetical order*

Muhal Richard Abrams – musician  
Michael Arlen – journalist  
Bill Ayers – antiwar activist  
Carroll Ballard – cameraman  
Peter Bart – Paramount Pictures  
James Baughman – historian  
Peter Biskind – historian  
Verna Bloom – actor  
Peter Bonerz – actor  
Alan Brinkley – historian  
Edward Burke – Chicago police  
Michael Butler – screenwriter  
Ray Carney – historian  
Jack Couffer – novelist  
Ian Christie – film historian  
Jay Cocks – critic  
Andrew Davis – filmmaker  
David Dellinger – activist  
Bernard Dick – historian  
Bernadine Dohrn – antiwar activist  
Jeff Donaldson – actor/artist  
General Richard Dunn – Illinois National Guard  
Roger Ebert – film critic  
Linn Ehrlich – photographer  
David Farber – historian  
Richard Flacks – activist  
Robert Forster – actor  
Reuven Frank – TV news executive  
Bill Frapolly – Chicago police  
Todd Gitlin – activist  
Paul Golding – editors  
Mark Goodall – historian  
Terrence Gordon – Marshall McLuhan scholar  
Mike Gray – cameraman  
Dick Gregory – activist  
Roger Guy – sociologist  
Duane Hall – photographer  
Dan Hallin – historian  
Tom Hayden – activist  
Jonathan Haze – production coordinator  
Neil Hickey – journalist

Thomas Jackson – historian  
 Tom Keenan – student reporter  
 Douglas Kellner – media theorist  
 Peter Kuttner – cameraman  
 Paul Levinson – media theorist  
 J. Fred MacDonald - historian  
 Philip Marchand – Marshall McLuhan biographer  
 Michael Margulies – cameraman  
 Arthur Marwick – historian  
 Paula Massood – historian  
 Al Maysles – documentary filmmaker  
 Eugene McCarthy – presidential candidate  
 Eric McLuhan – media theorist  
 Chris Newman – sound recordist  
 Steven North – producer  
 Robert Paige –artist  
 D.A. Pennebaker – filmmaker  
 Felton Perry – actor  
 General John Phipps – Illinois National Guard  
 Gordon Quinn – cameraman  
 William Rainbolt - historian  
 Jonah Raskin – media theorist  
 Michael Renov – historian  
 Don Rose – activist  
 Richard Schickel – film critic  
 John Schultz – historian  
 Bobby Seale – activist  
 Paul Siegel – historian  
 John Simon – film critic  
 David Sterritt – film critic  
 Lance Strate – media theorist  
 Studs Terkel – Chicago historian  
 Peggy Terry – activist  
 Ron Vargas – cameraman  
 Nicholas von Hoffman - journalist  
 Francis Ward – historian  
 Val Ward – actress  
 Haskell Wexler – writer/director  
 Leonard Weinglass – attorney  
 Irwin Yablans – Paramount Pictures  
 Quentin Young – Medical Committee for Human Rights

# Chapters

**Prologue**  
**History and Film**  
Page 6

**1**  
**The Spontaneity and the Messiness**  
page 7

**2**  
**The Road to Cataclysm**  
Page 12

**3**  
**Protest in the Concrete Wilderness**  
Page 17

**4**  
**Appalachia in Uptown**  
Page 23

**5**  
**Moving with the Firepoints**  
page 35

**6**  
**“They were doing theatre”**  
page 52

**7**  
**The Former Invisible Man Lives**  
page 56

**8**  
**A Nice Day in the Park**  
page 77

**9**  
**The Woman in the Yellow Dress**  
page 82

10  
**The Whole World is Watching**  
page 87

11  
**The Medium is the Message**  
Page 100

12  
**The Corpse at the Accident**  
Page 119

13  
**The Living Room War**  
page 128

14  
**“Look out Haskell, it’s real!”**  
page 135

15  
**The Arrangement with Warren**  
Page 138

16  
**Hitting Them Where They Live**  
Page 140

**Epilogue**  
**Mrs Wexler and the IMAX Camera**  
Page 149

## Prologue

### History and Film

#### Haskell Wexler

History is written by the people who own the pens, the typewriters, the printing presses, the movie cameras, the TV cameras. In 1968 in America, history was being written by people who were ignoring history. It was a crazy, mixed up time in America where the establishment, the status quo, was ignoring a ferment in the people. I'd made a lot of documentaries and I had an opportunity to make a feature film. The feature film I was assigned to make didn't have anything to do with what was really happening in my country, and in the case of Chicago in 1968, nothing to do with my city. So I decided to make a film which reflected the energy and the excitement that was being ignored, and which I felt so passionately about.

## The Spontaneity and the Messiness

### David Sterritt

There has always been a current within the cinema of various different countries, including the United States, that has wanted to rebel against the cumbersome, almost unwieldy commercial cinema with its big cameras and its fancy sound stages, its highly paid performers and this whole aura of glamour and unreality. There have always been filmmakers who want to react against that and to bring cinema back to having something of the spontaneity and the messiness and the unpredictability of life as we actually live it. Certainly Jean-Luc Godard was one of these people who wanted to go out with a small crew and lightweight equipment, and make movies that blurred the boundary between what was being done as storytelling and what was being done as “doing cinema in the world.”

### Carroll Ballard

It all started with the situation that existed at that time, the early Sixties, where most of the film that was being done was with these gigantic cameras and huge crews. It was the old Hollywood club. You had a few people who were starting to break the surface of that.

### David Sterritt

John Cassavetes is one of the crucial figures in all this with his idea of constantly changing a movie as it went along, of using improvisational techniques as a route toward developing a script. And of course Haskell Wexler is one of those cinematographers who even as a Hollywood director of photography was involved in bringing this kind of look of reality into even the studio film.

### Mike Gray

When Haskell arrived in Hollywood he was an outsider, an absolute outsider. The cameraman's union wouldn't even consider him. That was a closed society. The only way you get into the cameraman's union here in Hollywood was to have been born into it, if you were the son or grandson of some famous cameraman. So Haskell sued them under fair labour practises, and won. When he hit Hollywood, people were dazzled because they'd never seen footage like that. Cameramen were used to a crew of thirty people with booms and cranes. Here comes this guy who's actually shooting natural light, which nobody could ever imagine you could do.

### Haskell Wexler

My first legal job in Hollywood was a picture called *The Best Man* starring Henry Fonda. They had a scene in the back of a limousine. It was supposed to be a process shot with the car in the foreground and the process screen in the background. I didn't

know how to do that, but I did know how to do what I did in documentaries, having a small camera in the front of the car, and so I said “Look, why don’t we just shoot it outside in the car and then we can break for lunch in fifteen minutes.” Henry Fonda says, “Yeah, let’s do it like the kid says.” And so I was able to do a shot that I know how to do, rather than a process shot that I didn’t know how to do.

### **Al Maysles**

All this change began really in 1960 when a group of us – Bob Drew, Leacock, Pennebaker and myself – came up with some new equipment that allowed just two people, a sound person and a camera person, in a very mobile fashion, without tripods or any of the paraphernalia that still encumbers news people in television, to make a film. This revolutionised the art of documentary because of this new equipment and this new philosophy of no narration, no host, no music to jazz it up. Simply to film directly – that’s why it became known as “Direct Cinema” – what’s going on. The viewer could rightly feel that he’s exactly there when it was happening, but with the added insight that a really good cameraman could add to it by noticing what most people wouldn’t notice.

### **Mike Gray**

We were very fortunate that Kodak had come up with a Tri-X black and white film. That gave you enough sensitivity. If you pushed it in the laboratory process you could film a scene by a light bulb and it would be perfectly sharp and in focus. Hollywood didn’t even know about this because they never had a problem with lighting. They had crews with barns full of lights and they had to be used anyway.

### **Carroll Ballard**

If you look at these older films, you see that it was just really boring filmmaking. It was pretty flat-lit, so you could see everything that was there. It was a master shot, a two shot and a close-up, and that was it. Rarely did you see anything that really had anything fluidity or movement.

### **Al Maysles**

We got all excited about the new possibilities, the philosophy and also the equipment. The equipment changes at that time are 16mm. Forget about 35mm, it had to be 16mm. You could get a ten-minute run instead of a minute or two or three before you had to change the magazine. The camera no longer had to be on a tripod, it could be firmly on your shoulder and you got an extremely steady shot. So it was the equipment and the philosophy. Go ahead and film things in such a fashion that you could say, at the end of it, when you put the film together, “That’s the truth.”



**D.A. Pennebaker**

It's like a paintbrush, as if you'd invented the paintbrush, or the pencil. People could write novels and paint pictures. Up until then they had to do stained glass. You could get characters who weren't trained or schooled or paid to recite lines. You could get characters in real life on film so that what they did and said drove a story.

**David Sterritt**

Feature films became interested in this idea of the movie looking more real, looking more spontaneous, looking – even if it wasn't really true – like life had just been captured as it happened.

**Ian Christie**

It became a matter of: how could you get this kind of immediacy onto the screen? I think for Wexler that was what was exciting. How do you get something immediate that is happening all around you onto the screen? The answer was to work with people who could improvise in a lot of different ways: improvise as actors, improvise as filmmakers. I think that's really the kernel of what he was trying to do in *Medium Cool*.

**Gordon Quinn**

We were all very interested in this idea of filming reality as it unfolds. Kartemquin, Newsreel, all these people working in these ways and being influenced by Leacock, the Maysles Brothers, Jean Rouch. Someone was picking up on what we had seen in some exciting European films, trying to weave a kind of narrative story into real events and that resonated with those real events. We were all pretty excited about what Haskell was doing.

**Mike Gray**

The main contribution he made was giving people the ability to get out of the studio and into real life. He was able to photograph real life, and then, of course, this idea occurred to him of installing real-life into a concept for a drama, and that, of course, became *Medium Cool*.

**William Rainbolt**

There's this fictional story, but what does it mean when you insert that fictional story into a reality that's beyond the filmmaker's control?

**Michael Renov**

We're going to use the backdrop of what's happening in the streets of Chicago in this summer of 1968 as something like the backdrop for this drama, but somewhere along the line some kind of change happens, and that change has everything to do with

what happens in the streets. History changed, the film changed. It's really to Haskell's credit that he made a series of decisions in which he more or less gave precedence to what was happening on the streets over what was happening in the screenplay.

### **David Sterritt**

Godard was very interested in not necessarily breaking down, but blurring and permeating boundaries between fictional and documentary. *Medium Cool* is a wonderful illustration of the very Godardian idea that every time you make a fiction film, you are photographing objects in the world, and that is a documentary act. On the other hand, every time you make a documentary film, you must choose how to frame your shot, what to include in the final edit, how to order the shots that are included in your final cut, which is exactly the kind of shaping and moulding that a fiction filmmaker does.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Documentary reality is slow. Fiction is fast and controlled. I think of documentary as being narrative, it's just a different kind of fiction.

### **David Sterritt**

When you set out to make a fiction movie, you always end up making a documentary, and when you set out to make a documentary you always end up making a fiction movie. I think that Haskell Wexler is after very similar things in *Medium Cool* with his blurring of the boundaries and crossing of the boundaries between fiction and documentary.

### **Haskell Wexler**

That whole idea, the whole thought and discussion of what's real, what's *cinéma-vérité*, what's truth, and so forth, is an argument that I used to have with the Maysles all the time. I worked with them on *Salesman* for a while.

### **Al Maysles**

*Salesman* took place in three states: Massachusetts, Florida and Illinois, Chicago. I think he may have taken a shot or two in the Chicago scene of the sales meeting that took place, but perhaps even more important he pre-lit the room. In Direct Cinema if you need lighting then you have to use it. The film stock that we had was not very sensitive to light, not enough for that situation, so Direct Cinema or not, you had to light it.

**Haskell Wexler**

We were in this hotel room in Las Vegas and nothing was happening, these guys were sitting around, so I asked David about this guy's wife. "Let's call her up and make some suggestions that they're gambling or going to one of these nudie shows." So David says "Great." He puts a bug on the phone, the wife calls in and we got the scene.

**David Sterritt**

This idea of going out with as few people as possible and with equipment that was as flexible as possible is what Haskell Wexler became a part of with *Medium Cool*. Going out capturing a story in the kind of real life context that might have been shaping the events and the ideas behind the making of the film in the first place.

## The Road to Cataclysm

### Alan Brinkley

There was a kind of cumulative revelation, it seems to me, over the course of the Sixties, culminating in 1968 to a large degree, of basic flaws and failures in American life.

### Archive – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring. When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

### Todd Gitlin

By 1968, increasing numbers of people felt that none of the institutions could save them. They didn't know what to do. They didn't believe in governments, they didn't believe in liberalism, they didn't believe in traditional left-wing ideologies, they didn't believe in capitalism. They didn't know quite what they believed in. There was a sense of being unmoored.

### Alan Brinkley

The sort of glittering, appealing, stable, public world that most people had accepted in the Fifties and early Sixties was being overtaken by a kind of shadow nation that emerged out of the darkness into the light in these days, sped along, of course, by the Vietnam War.

### Archive – "U.S. Build-Up: More Troops Embark For Southeast Asia"

Inside the army base at Oakland, California, a scene reminiscent of the recent past. Years of the Korean and World War Two campaigns is re-enacted by yet another generation of young Americans. In response to the stepped-up pressure of the Communists in South Vietnam, the United States continues its arms build-up. Within weeks, fifty thousand additional troops, and all the materiel of war, will be committed, bringing the total of American forces in South Vietnam to 125,000.

### Todd Gitlin

By 1968, there are hundreds of thousands, probably millions, of young people principally, who are infuriated by the war, by the bloodshed and the wrong-headedness, the utter indefensibility of the war, who see the war as not only taking

up the bulk of their own adult lives but can imagine it going on in perpetuity, who are desperate and who have come to feel, for a variety of reasons, that the war has become the pure expression of the worst of America.

#### **Archive – “Peace March: Thousand Oppose Vietnam War”**

Anti-war demonstrators protest U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, in mass marches, rallies and demonstrations. Central Park is the starting point for the parade to the U.N building. The estimated 125,000 Manhattan marchers include students, housewives, Beatnik poets, doctors, businessmen, teachers, priests and nuns.

#### **David Farber**

By early 1968, the United States was being torn apart by the war in Vietnam. At the beginning of February, the Tet Offensive began. The North Vietnamese unexpectedly invaded every major city in Vietnam. The United States public was not ready for that, didn't expect it, had been lied to by the President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson.

#### **Archive – voiceover**

The Communists had launched a massive New Year's offensive late in January. For their endeavours the Viet Cong paid heavily in men and materiel.

#### **Dan Hallin**

Tet was an offensive by the North Vietnamese. It was a very ambitious surprise offensive that led to a huge increase in the level of fighting. It affected public opinion and news coverage partly because it came against the backdrop of reassurances that things were going well, and then all of a sudden the fighting is much more intense, and partly also because it just produced much more dramatic news coverage, scenes of close-in fighting of a sort that you normally didn't see in coverage of the Vietnam War.

#### **Archive – voiceover**

The situation caused grave concern in Washington. Yet through it all, during the next twenty-nine days, the President would re-emphasise America's determination to stand fast in Southeast Asia and seek a peace with honour. The President began a series of meetings with top-level advisors to determine precisely what the American response should be.

#### **Archive – Robert Kennedy**

I'm reassessing what I should do as not only a member of the Democratic Party, but more importantly as a United States citizen.

### **David Farber**

When the election of 1968 begins to heat up, this upstart rebel candidate, a fellow named Eugene McCarthy from the state of Minnesota, a relative unknown, takes on the sitting President over Vietnam and he comes within a few votes of defeating him in the New Hampshire primary. Johnson is shaken to his bones by this.

### **Archive – *The Making of the President, 1968***

First to announce as candidate, Democratic Senator Eugene McCarthy has challenged Lyndon Johnson and the war. New Hampshire's primary is his first battleground. There, a solitary troubadour of peace, he tramps through streets and factories.

### **Alan Brinkley**

Gene McCarthy agreed to run in 1968 after Robert Kennedy had declined to do so because he believed there needed to be an anti-war candidate in the race, and that Johnson needed to be challenged by someone who opposed his policies in Vietnam.

### **Archive – Eugene McCarthy**

As I see the campaign in '68, the issue of Vietnam itself is a vital one of course. You can pass a harsh judgement on that war if it were isolated altogether from any domestic consequences or any other international consequences. But underneath all of this, I think, is a fundamental judgement that we are called upon to make as to what the real role of America is. What direction do we want to give America and what influence we want it to have on the rest of the world? I see this is the fundamental test that we have to face up to in the electoral process of the year of nineteen hundred and sixty-eight.

### **Eugene McCarthy**

I was against the war and nothing was being done about it. Persons whom I thought were responsible were not responding. That was two categories. The first, of course, was the President and the administration. We'd had four or five Presidencies and they had all supported the war. The second was the Senate, and it refused to act. So the only course of action available with any practical potential was the primaries.

### **Archive – Eugene McCarthy**

I've said that we ought to publicly indicate our willingness to accept a new government in South Vietnam, which would be a coalition government, or a fusion government. I don't really care what they call it. You'd have to anticipate it would include elements of the National Liberation Front, because this is really what the war is being fought about.

### **Leonard Weinglass**

It was his victory in New Hampshire – a surprising showing again a sitting President – that probably led to President Johnson's withdrawal from the campaign.

### **Archive – voiceover**

Shortly before 9pm Washington time, in the midst of last minute electronic preparation, President Johnson put the finishing touches to his address to the nation. Finally, with the reassuring presence of his family, seated nearby, the President was ready to deliver one of the most important speeches of his entire life.

### **Archive – President Lyndon Johnson**

With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes, or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office, the Presidency of your country. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.

### **David Farber**

And as that's building, Robert Kennedy has joined the race. He too wants to seek the Presidential nomination, the Senator from New York, the brother of the slain President from 1963, John Kennedy.

### **Archive – Robert Kennedy**

I am announcing my candidacy for the Presidency of the United States. I do not run for the Presidency merely to oppose any man, but to propose new policies. My decision reflects no personal animosity or disrespect toward President Johnson. The issue is not personal. It is our profound differences over where we are heading and what we want to accomplish.

### **Archive – Robert Kennedy**

I come here to Camden recognising a difficult campaign ahead. But I ask for your help. I think that we can make a difference. I ask you, how many will help over the period of the next few months?

### **Arthur Marwick**

The real hope of all liberal, anti-war candidates. Obviously there had been a tremendous reaction against President Johnson, Democrats and non Democrats, people who opposed the war, they were hoping that Robert Kennedy would be the Democratic candidate in the coming election.

### **David Farber**

All this is leading up to this cataclysm in Chicago in August 1968, when the Democrats will have to decide, "Do we respect President Johnson and pick his successor to continue the war, or do we go for a peace candidate?" So the whole election just turns into a free for all. No one knows how it's going to turn out, no one knows who's going to win.

### **Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn**

None of us who had been hardcore anti-war organisers thought that we were then going to turn to Gene McCarthy or Bobby Kennedy. We thought of them as part of the problem. We cut our teeth as anti-war radicals and Civil Rights radicals against the do-nothingness of the liberals.

### **Archive – voiceover**

But then, at 8.05pm Eastern Standard Time, the country was stunned by the tragic news out of Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Negro apostle of non-violence, had been shot and killed by an assassin.

### **Leonard Weinglass**

It came down to the primary in California between the two front-runners who were both anti-war candidates, Senator Kennedy and Senator McCarthy, and Senator Kennedy won that primary.

### **Archive – Robert Kennedy**

What I think is quite clear is that we can work together in the last analysis. What has been going within the United States over the period of the last three years, the divisions, the violence, the disenchantment with our society, the divisions whether it's between blacks and whites, between poor and the more affluent, or between age groups on the war in Vietnam, we can start to work together. We are a great country, a selfless country and a compassionate country. And I intend to make that my basis for running over the period... Mayor Yorty has just sent me a message saying we've been here too long already. So my thanks to all of you, and now it's on to Chicago, and let's win there.

### **Archive – voiceover**

Early the next morning, June 6, Robert Kennedy died, his death coming just four and half years after the assassination of his brother and only two months after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King cast another dark shadow of grief across America.



## Protest in the Concrete Wilderness

### Ian Christie

For people of Wexler's generation, it was very much the inspiration of the new waves coming from Europe that gave them a sense that they could make an entry into feature-scale cinema, not through the traditional Hollywood route. Before that you'd always served your apprenticeship, you were a part of Hollywood, you were either in it or out of it, but for a whole generation of filmmakers there were other ways in, and all over the world there were people making documentaries, which was the traditional way you started as a small filmmaker, which of course Wexler did, and then you could make the transition into making longer films, and there wouldn't necessarily be this sharp division between fiction and documentary. You would carry over into your fictional work much of what you'd learned in documentary.

### David Sterritt

All the New Wave filmmakers – the *nouvelle vague* filmmakers in France – had a tremendous influence on American cinema, and cinema elsewhere as well. They were really pioneers, picking up themselves from the Italian neo-realists and then bringing their own interests in cinematic style into play.

### Jay Cocks

There was a sense of mechanical and stylistic liberation in film at that time that came through those film channels and then got filtered through the great social upheavals that were going on then, through the music and politics. That seems to tune up to the boiling point everyone's excitement about working more loosely in film.

### David Sterritt

Godard's whole idea of a much more spontaneous and intuitive and free-wheeling cinema was very much more in synch with a lot of American social ideas than more traditional forms of cinema had been.

### Ray Carney

I'm certain that Wexler, being an intelligent and sensitive cameraman, is going to those films and asking himself, "Why am I doing what I'm doing when I could be doing this other very different thing? Edgier, more dangerous, more threatening, more exciting work." *Medium Cool*, in a way, is the answer he gives himself, which is "I can do that thing," and maybe do it so that millions of people will see it in terms of something that looks like a Hollywood film but is as true as the documentary films of the early and mid-Sixties.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Around 1968 I'd been shooting a lot of documentaries and I really wanted to direct my own feature film. In working in documentaries, I realised that I could get deeper into the true reality of the scene by arranging things, by organising things, by playing with what you might call "reality." When I got the opportunity to make a legitimate feature film, I was happy because then I could make that step from documentary, which is supposed to be non-fiction, into true honest fiction. I was trying to utilise what I've learned and what I'm still learning from documentary filmmaking, and integrate that into theatrical or fiction filmmaking and finding those areas where the two overlap.

### **Ian Christie**

Hollywood was running scared in the Sixties. The power of the studios had been broken in many ways, and Hollywood was wide open to taking on board new kinds of talents. It's really interesting that Wexler was able to be both a top-level director of photography, and at the same time he was able to run around, acting as his own operator, on the streets, shooting from the shoulder. This was possible in the late Sixties in a way that it had never been before.

### **Mark Goodall**

It's interesting to note that Wexler worked on Joseph Strick's *The Savage Eye*, a 1960 film, which, interestingly, is one of the early films that inserted an actor into a real locale, a real context. It has a very Godardian feel to it. It takes an actor and places him in a real location, follows him in a documentary style. That's the hybrid moment. Documentary and fiction storytelling coming together, and slightly confounding the viewer. Is this a documentary? Is it a fiction film? Are those people real people or are they actors? So in 1960 Wexler was already working within this idea of reality and fantasy and fiction and fact. Where do they blur?

### **Ian Christie**

The older generation of DPs was having to learn new tricks, and the studios were looking for new tricks as well. They wanted desperately to harness this new talent, and for Wexler – who had been politicised by his own experiences in the army, of the Civil Rights movement – it was absolutely important to carry this political message into a form that would reach a wider audience. I guess that what he realised was that making documentaries, with the best will in the world, was not going to get this issues up on a big screen, and so the issue was how could you make a film that struck a balance between the demands of a feature film and that looked sufficiently like a feature to be acceptable to theatres, and yet at the same time contain that political message about what was going on in America in 1968.

### **Jack Couffer**

What happened was that I wrote this novel called *The Concrete Wilderness*, and Paramount bought it. They assigned it to a contract director called Buzz Kulick. Part of the deal was that I write a screenplay, which I did. I couldn't satisfy Buzz with the screenplay, and it all went into limbo at that point. Haskell has just finished shooting *Virginia Woolf*, so he was really hot and he wanted to direct a picture. So Paramount wanted to find something for Haskell, and here was this thing sitting in limbo.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Peter Bart was an officer of Paramount and he knew that I wanted to make my own film. He had a project called *The Concrete Wilderness* which was about a young boy who finds animals in Central Park and he also grazes pigeons. He said, "Haskell, this is the perfect book to make into a film for a director of photography. We'll put up the money for it on a negative pick-up deal, which means that you make the script as agreed, deliver it on time with certain necessities, and then we will pay you back the budget we agreed on, and we will share in the profits."

### **Irwin Yablans**

A negative pick-up is simply what the term implied: a film made outside the studio by other source of finance was offered to the studio for distribution. That obviously meant that we would have to take on some sort of risk and commit to cash sums either for the use of the film or, at the very least, for distribution expenses.

### **Peter Bart**

The deal offered to Haskell Wexler by the studio was that we would finance the movie but that he had to (a) raise the money to shoot it, and (b) deliver the finished negative, at which point the studio would reimburse him \$600,000.

### **Peter Biskind**

It's a marriage between the studio system and the independents. Haskell brought a completely anti-Hollywood aesthetic and politic to the film and yet it used studio-level expertise to make the film, so it looked great, whereas all the films being made outside the studio system at the time were very raggedy.

### **Peter Bart**

The feeling at Paramount was that there was a very exciting movie under way. This was a momentous time in our history and I personally was delighted that we were making a cutting-edge picture and not trying to recapture what had been happening only a couple of years earlier when Paramount released things like *Darling Lili* and *Paint Your Wagon*, the most pedestrian, bourgeois movies imaginable. By God, we were out there making an exciting movie. I thought his ideas about this picture were brilliant. The whole methodology that Haskell wanted to employ – the marriage of the documentary and the dramatic film – was an absolutely fascinating one.

### **Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn**

I remember we put posters all over Chicago. We had a little newspaper called *The Street Wall Journal* and instead of “All the News that’s Fit to Print,” which was the *New York Times* slogan, we had “All the News that Writ to Fit.” One of the posters had a picture of young people with flowers and linking arms and it said, “Youth will make the Revolution. Youth will make it and keep it. Stay Young. Stay Beautiful.” That was part of the idea of Don’t Trust Anyone Over Thirty. One of the wonderfully refreshing things in those years was not only the sense of youth movement that could carry the day, but was to find on occasions older allies who embraced us with the same spirit that we intended our revolution to be, and Haskell Wexler was one of those.

### **Haskell Wexler**

The electricity, the excitement, the ferment that was in the country at that time was not being reflected through anybody’s camera, and that’s what drove me from *The Concrete Wilderness* to *Medium Cool*.

### **Jack Couffer**

We talked about. He called me on the phone and told me where he was on the thing, and he made it quite clear that he wasn’t really interested in my story, that he had his own thing. I said, “Well, great Haskell. You got a chance to do you own thing. Go with it.”

### **Peter Bart**

*The Concrete Wilderness* was an interesting book, but of course as he got closer to shooting this – shall we say – polite understanding came into being that officially the project would still go under that name, but that he was making a very different picture.

### **Jack Couffer**

He did pick a few little bits and pieces from my story. There was still a kid and his mother. There was still a news photographer. The kid wasn’t a biologist. The closest he came to biology and the wildlife of the city was that he raised pigeons on the roof of the apartment building where he lived. That’s about as close a connection that *Medium Cool* has to *The Concrete Wilderness*.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Rather than make a film, *The Concrete Wilderness*, about a boy and his animals in the city, I wanted to make something that felt more personal to me, and that’s why I made a film which is about a cameraman and his conscience. I am that news cameraman. I’ve been faced with the idea that I am a creator of images and presenter of images, and I wanted those images to reflect my view of life.

### **Jay Cocks**

Haskell's objective was to pin something down about America in 1968, to try and analyse the confluence of all these social streams that were coming together into this great torrent that seemed for a while as if it was going to flood all of society. He had some strong sense that the riots were going to occur. He was prepared for them probably more than the Chicago police.

### **Tom Hayden**

It began with the street confrontations in 1967 in Oakland at the draft board, which at the time was the template for Chicago, so I know we were thinking that far ahead, sometime around late 1967.

### **David Farber**

Chicago first become a focal point for the anti-war movement probably by November of 1967 as they began to plot out how to up the ante, how to make people in the United States know that this war was not going to continue with the American people quiet.

### **General Richard Dunn**

There was civil disturbance training going on by the National Guard to some extent throughout the United States but probably to the greatest extent in Illinois. There had been a series of disturbances in the United States, including the Watt riots in 1965 in Los Angeles and a big one in Detroit. Everybody knew that there was turmoil in the country at that time and it erupted, obviously, after Martin Luther King's assassination. There was a growing antipathy to the Vietnam War. Everybody from the Federal Government on down knew we better get ready for it.

### **Arthur Marwick**

Everyone knew that this Democratic Convention in 1968 was going to attract an awful lot of protestors because those who wanted to see the Democratic party and a Democratic President take up the cudgels against the Vietnam war would be there, turning out in force in support of a candidate who supported their cause elected. Mayor Daley announced quite openly that if any trouble-makers came to his Chicago, they would know what to expect. He made sure that his entire police force was on duty twelve hours a day throughout the entire Democratic Convention. There were twelve thousand of them. He also made sure that he had six thousand National Guardsmen on call should things develop in the way everyone thought they might do.

### **Tom Hayden**

There was this concept that we could surround the Democratic Convention, and somehow the pressure of the occasion would cause a challenge within the party, within the Convention, against Johnson, against Vietnam, combined with outside the Convention, a massive mobilisation.

### **Arthur Marwick**

Daley had said what he would do if protestors came, and it is a historical fact that many fewer anti-Vietnam war protestors turned up than were expected. Many just thought that it would be far too dangerous. Tom Hayden, the leader of SDS, the student group, actually said that he expected to meet his death in Chicago.

### **Tom Hayden**

When King and then Bobby Kennedy were murdered, it added to the apocalyptic dimension of it all, the despair of it all. Without a nominee on the inside wresting the nomination from Johnson, and without a figure like King on the outside, we were spirited, we were militant, we were determined we would stand our ground, but there was no way that I knew how there could be a fruition. So it became kind of an existential drama.

### **Roger Ebert**

I went to a movie in the Loop and I walked into one of those \$1.19 steak houses and who did I see there but two people I knew, Tom Hayden and Rennie Davis. I'd gone to college with Rennie Davis and was a member of Students for a Democratic Society when Tom Hayden was the president, and they were planning at that time some kind of protest at the convention and Haskell must have heard about this. He had this brilliant idea to take fictional characters and a vague outline of a fictional story and plug it into real events and shoot it documentary style.

### **Haskell Wexler**

The script was written and registered at the Writers Guild about a month before we started shooting. I did not imagine the scope of the conflicts in the streets, but I did believe that it would be there if the Democratic Party did not respond to the organised resentment of the American people to the Vietnam War. I heard from many of my friends in the anti-war movement that they were going to mount some kind of demonstration unless the Democratic Party took a stand against the Vietnam War. When it was clear that they weren't going to take a stand against the war, it was clear to me that there would be some kind of confrontation. The scope of the confrontation was far more extensive than I could ever have imagined. I thought I would have to dramatise whatever was there, hire a bunch of guys to act like National Guard or cops. Never did I have the faintest idea that it would be of that magnitude.

## Appalachia in Uptown

### Haskell Wexler

I've known Studs Terkel since I was a kid, and when I went to make *Medium Cool* I went straight to Studs, because Studs knows everybody. I wouldn't have been able to know any of the people in the Appalachian community, critical to the film, if it weren't for Studs. I knew I wanted to shoot in Uptown, Chicago. I'd lived in Monteagle, Tennessee and worked with poor whites. Appalachians are the poorest of poor whites and they had a community in Uptown. Charles Geary who plays the father of the little boy in the film was an organiser in Uptown, and no way could I have ever met him if it wasn't for Studs Terkel. They wouldn't talk to me. They went, "What is this, some guy from Hollywood? Some filmmaker?" It was absolutely critical that Studs gave me entrée to all the people who are in the film.

### Steven North

Studs was the inspirational fairy. Whenever there was a question of how we could do something in Chicago or who did we have to get to in Chicago, he would get us there. We would go to Studs every weekend or the days we weren't shooting and sit around his living room and he would be telling us, "Why don't you do this, Haskell?" and "Why don't you do that, Haskell?"

### Studs Terkel

He knows I know the town, he knows the town. I've known him for year. So he called me "Our Man in Chicago." Now that was an adventure! Now Haskell himself was the cinematographer, director and conceiver of the whole thing.

### Jonathan Haze

Uptown was really a strange place. It was all Hillbillies from down south, from Kentucky and West Virginia. They were coal miners who were out of work and had to go someplace, so they went to Chicago, where they were living ten and fifteen to an apartment. It was filthy. The neighbourhood was a complete wreck. Everybody was on the street all day long, screaming and hollering. The kids were all playing. I don't know if they ever went to school.

### Paul Siegel

By the Sixties, increasingly people from the coalfields were the key group of southern whites in Uptown. There was massive technological displacement as they brought in new machinery, and also regional depression as coal falls into a decline, and oil is up and coming, and you've got the beginnings of nuclear. You had massive displacement and tremendous poverty in counties like McDowell County, West Virginia and Harlan County, Kentucky. Thousands and thousands of people had to leave, and they came to the cities looking for industrial work.

### **John Schultz**

In the 1960s there was a large influx of Appalachian immigrants into the Uptown area of Chicago. Several groups saw the Uptown area and the Appalachian young people as really a great place to develop social movements, protest movements. SDS was working in the Uptown area in the months prior to the Convention.

### **Todd Gitlin**

SDS, Students for a Democratic Society, the organisation that I connected with felt one of our missions was to organise for a guaranteed income, the idea that we would try to mobilise poor people of various ethnicities to collaborate with the poor part of the Civil Rights movement toward economic change.

### **Paul Siegel**

SDS became a massive student movement that spoke for the idea of the New Left, participatory democracy, people getting control of their own lives, a decentralist vision of organising and society.

### **Richard Flacks**

I was in the SDS leadership when we were deciding on these so-called projects. The idea arose in the tensions and interrelationships between SDS and SNCC that SDS should embark on organising poor whites in northern cities as a kind of parallel to the southern black organising that SNCC was doing, rather than sympathetic whites keeping on pouring into the south to try and help there. The real help would be to create what Hayden wrote a paper about, “the interracial movement of the poor.” There were a number of cities in the north that were targeted for investigation. Were these places where such a project could be established?

### **Paul Siegel**

ERAP – the Economic Research and Action Project – was the first attempt by SDS to move beyond the campus and organise poor and working class communities. Chicago was one of the places that ERAP went to, and what became JOIN was the ERAP organisers from SDS coming out of the campus movement. Uptown was the one place where an ERAP project developed some staying power.

### **Todd Gitlin**

It looked as though the best results would come from focusing on Uptown, a specific neighbourhood, less than a square mile, not far from the lake, from the Fifties the port of entry neighbourhood for people from the Appalachian area, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, northern Alabama, Georgia. Always we were looking for accomplished and articulate well-organised local people who would take on the primary work of the organisations, and Peggy Terry was one of the people that we came across as somebody who was accomplished and committed and available.



### **Richard Flacks**

Once they settled in the neighbourhood, then at least a couple of them were effectively able to move out and get to know people. The Saul Alinsky model of organising is far more professional than what these people were doing at that point. But they still had some ability to connect with what we called indigenous people, and Peggy Terry would be a prime example of that.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Peggy Terry was an incredible Appalachian woman who worked in the community organising, trying to get a better life for them, dealing with the social workers, trying to help the people living in the slums of Chicago.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take**

Eileen	This is real good. Where'd you get this?
Peggy Terry	A store in the neighbourhood.
Eileen	Tastes like homemade.

### **Paul Siegel**

She was not somebody they met knocking on doors on Clifton Street. Peggy had a far more complex history than that. Peggy grew up as a poor white from the South and came to break from racism and became aligned with the Civil Rights struggle in the South and then in Chicago. Peggy became extremely alienated from her own roots among poor whites in the South during that period.

### **Thomas Jackson**

Peggy Terry was a Chicago-based activist whose life had been turned around in the 1930s by experiencing the kindness of black people. She had grown up very racist but her family was destitute and homeless, and black folks supported and fed them. It really turned her eyes around to the fact that poor whites, as well as poor blacks, suffered from the same causes of oppression and poverty.

### **Paul Siegel**

She was so revolted by racism and couldn't stand to hear racist terms, and was really committed to the struggle for black equality, that she kind of tried to turn her back on her own heritage. Then, lo and behold, the concept of Black Power comes along, and in the freedom struggle, in SNCC and CORE, the blacks said to the whites, "You're in the way because we have to have African-American controlled organisations in order to overcome all the racism that's imposed upon us. Even the most well-intentioned whites are in the way because we have to control our own organisations and our own agenda. You whites who have been committed, we want you to go organise your people. You organise in the white community, including and



Peggy Terry We don't either. Too big a parking problem. Besides, I can't drive.

Haskell Wexler *(off)* Ask her if she has a job.

Peggy Terry Where do you work? You got a job?

Eileen Yeah, I work at the Motorola plant where they make the TVs. At the one where I work all they do is make colour TVs. It's a pretty good job.

Peggy Terry It must place pretty good.

Eileen Yeah, but I still got a problem because I gotta send a lot of money back home. I still got family back there.

Peggy Terry Almost everybody in the neighbourhood sends money back home.

Eileen Well, it must be hard for some people who don't have as good a job as that.

Peggy Terry It is. It's hard just to make it, to say nothing of sending money back home. But it's worse down there.

Eileen I know, you don't have to tell me. But I was a schoolteacher when I was down home.

Peggy Terry You were a schoolteacher?

Eileen Yeah. I didn't make much money but I liked it better. I'd liked to teach school up here only I can't. You know, because they don't recognise me as a regular teacher. It don't make any difference to them what I did down there so I work in the factory. But that's OK because I make good money.

Peggy Terry I know, I have a friend who was a teacher and she said that to be able to teach here you had to do special tests where they recognise it. I guess they think we're not as smart as they are.

Haskell Wexler *(off)* Ask her if she has kids.

Peggy Terry You got any kids?

Eileen I got one boy.

Peggy Terry How old?

Haskell Wexler *(off)* Harold's twelve.

Eileen He's twelve.

Peggy Terry Oh, my boy's fourteen. Maybe they can get to be friends.

Eileen You got a boy of fourteen? I don't know, Harold's kind of quiet. He don't have too many friends around here. I think he's sort of homesick a lot, you know. Plays with his birds all the time but he doesn't play with the kids too much.

Peggy Terry                      He should get acquainted with my boy. My boy's just the opposite. Maybe they'd make a good team.  
Eileen                              I don't know...

### **Richard Flacks**

JOIN was the name of the project, but the concept became one of creating what we call a community union. This was an insightful idea, and was attempted by SDS in a number of other cities. It became a form of organising that has evolved to this day. The idea was that if there are labour unions at the workplace, couldn't there be some parallel kind of organisation in a community? It could be around rental issues and rights, or issues of community safety and security like garbage removal and street repair, and other kinds of demands like that. It could be about schools, or any issue that would bring people together. The idea of a union implies a strategy of collective action, not just going down to City Hall, but really saying, "We have some way of empowering ourselves," like a labour union has.

### **Roger Guy**

The student activists worked with community members on rent strikes, welfare benefits, more benefits for the poor. Housing conditions in Uptown were really substandard and JOIN worked with community members, people that lived in Uptown, to protest those conditions.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take**

Eileen                              What is that button you got there? What does JOIN mean?  
Peggy Terry                      That's for Joint Community Union. It stands for "Jobs or Income Now." They can't give us a job, then give us an income.  
Eileen                              "Jobs or Income Now." Who started that group?

### **Roger Guy**

Some sociologists have called it an "emergent identity" that the Southern whites weren't conscious of until they migrated, and then they were conspicuous in the urban environment and were labelled and treated as outsiders. They were fairly unwanted. There were very strong stereotypes that were not necessarily accurate that preceded the southerners' arrival in Chicago about Southerner's hygiene, about Southerners' habits, about Southerner's family lives, the Hillbilly bars, like the fighting, like the drinking. That stereotype was confirmed in part by their presence in Uptown. They came to an area that was already in decline in terms of the housing and the neighbourhood, and so they became linked with the decline, but the decline had preceded their arrival.

## Peggy Terry

Uptown was a slum. There were apartments that weren't fit to keep your pet in. The police would come in that area like an occupied country. They killed a couple of our young men. If they caught our kids out after curfew, which was nine o'clock, they would sometimes take them down to the lake and beat them between the legs.

## Jonathan Haze

Peggy ran the neighbourhood. She was like a community organiser. Everybody knew her and she knew everybody. I don't even think it would have been safe to be in that neighbourhood without Peggy.

## *Medium Cool* out-take

Eileen

What school's your boy go to?

Peggy Terry

Am I supposed to say the real one?

Haskell Wexler (*off*)

Anything you want. Say it again Verna.

Eileen

What school does your boy go to?

Peggy Terry

He goes to Stockton.

Eileen

Ah, my boy goes there too. Not a very good school though.

Peggy Terry

I know. None of them are very good.

Eileen

Around here, you mean? I wish there was something somebody could do about it. Doesn't seem fair.

Everybody pays the same taxes and things. Some schools are good and some of them isn't.

Peggy Terry

Well, they just have the attitude that our kids aren't going to go anywhere anyway, so why bother? That's the way it seems to be.

Eileen

That paper that you put out. Can that help for things like the schools around?

Peggy Terry

Well, we have had articles in there about the bad conditions of the schools. It may not help to change the schools, but at least it helps the people in the neighbourhood understand.

Eileen

Does anyone read the paper except the people in the neighbourhood? Does it get out any other places?

Peggy Terry

Well, we have a mailing list of about five hundred. It goes all over the country.

Eileen

Oh yeah?

Peggy Terry

Like I say, it probably don't do any good anywhere except in the neighbourhood to help people understand.

Eileen

But what good is it if they just understand like I understand? That doesn't help change the situation at the school so my boy can learn more there.

Peggy Terry You're a teacher and maybe you do understand, but most people feel that they're responsible because their kids don't learn to read. They think it's their fault. They think their kids are stupid.

Eileen I understand that but it still doesn't help them to learn to read. Understanding the problem isn't the solution. You know?

Peggy Terry Maybe learning to read isn't as important as some people think. It's important that kids learn to read, but it's also important that they get to keep their dignity, and if in the process of learning to read they're robbed of their dignity, then learning to read ain't so much. It seems to me we should have schools that can let children have both. Your boy hasn't been slapped around yet and been called a damned hillbilly. Wait until that happens.

Eileen Well, I don't know. If he has, he hasn't told me. Maybe that's one of the things that's wrong with him. He's so quiet most of the time he doesn't say nothing.

Peggy Terry It just seems that most teachers take the attitude that most kids are stupid, so why bother with them.

### *Medium Cool* out-take

Eileen What's the other button you got there?

Peggy Terry That's a guy named Huey Newton in California. He's in jail. They got him charged with murder, and we're trying to get him out. They're just fighting for their freedom, like we're trying to do here. Hillbillies aren't free either. Like one woman from the neighbourhood said, you know the playground down here? We went to the Park Commission to ask them to fix that right up for kids in the neighbourhood.

Eileen Oh that one down at the end of the street, the one that the mayor put up.

Peggy Terry Right. And we went to the Park Commission to ask them for that place, for a playground for the kids. What they told us was that niggers were burning down the town, and they were getting all the money, so this one little woman, she's from the south, she stood up and said, "What I think you're saying is that niggers are burning down the town and they're getting everything." But she says, "If takes a riot to get us a playground, us hillbillies can work you up a damn good riot." And I thought that was funny.

Eileen                                      You said that you asked for that playground, but that thing you showed me in the paper says it was put up by Mayor Daley.

Peggy Terry                               Well, he takes credit for everything, except police brutality.

Eileen                                      But he didn't do that. I mean, he wasn't responsible for the playground? You got it yourselves?

Peggy Terry                               Of course we got it ourselves. That's one of the things we really got for ourselves. He don't give you nothing. You have to fight for everything.

### **Peggy Terry**

Everybody in the neighbourhood was involved in this movie because it was something exciting. We were people who'd never been around anything like that, and kids came from everywhere. He didn't need to call anyone for street scenes, they were just there.

### **Haskell Wexler**

I just hung out in the streets of Uptown, Chicago and watched the kids playing in the streets, and watched their characteristics and a couple of times I would talk to them, and that's how I found Harold Blankenship.

### **Jonathan Haze**

We'd been looking for a kid to do this part for weeks. We had pictures of kids from Hollywood and we had gone to all of the acting classes in Chicago, trying to find the perfect kid to play an Appalachian kid. The kids were all too effete and too educated and too clean, so we decided to go to Uptown with a station wagon and a couple of cases of sodas in it.

### **Verna Bloom**

They were offering free soda and maybe free candy bars to all the kids in the neighbourhood who might be possibilities to play this part.

### **Jonathan Haze**

Sooner or later we figured a kid would show up who would be right or close to right and we'd go from there. The kids were having a wonderful time and then they'd go tell their brothers and sisters and they'd come back to get a soda, so we had a good crowd. Walking down the street is this little, skinny, sullen-faced kid. Haskell or I said to him, "Hey kid, you want a soda?" He said, "I don't want your damned soda," and he just kept walking. We all knew instantly. There was no discussion. We all knew. That was the kid.

### **Steven North**

Haskell really wanted to use a kid from the street. He didn't want some bright-eyed Hollywood actor to be thrown into the middle of the Chicago streets, and I think that that film really does gain from having a child that comes from the ghetto and is part of the milieu. There's no way you could have brought a kid from Hollywood, put him into Uptown and made it work.

### **Verna Bloom**

He was a really intelligent child, but he had virtually no education, he couldn't read. For example the scene, one of my favourite scenes, when he's reading from one of his books about pigeons.

### **Haskell Wexler**

I would say the words to him, and then he would say the words on camera. He would be looking at the book, and I would say what the book says and then he would say it after me, and then I would shoot it.

### *Medium Cool*

Harold

The racing pigeon, or homing pigeon, remains faithful to its mate throughout its life, provided that the mate is present at all times, especially when the male bird returns after a long flight.

### **Haskell Wexler**

When the social worker come to Harold to ask him questions about his family, I told Harold certain things that he should say. But he couldn't remember them exactly, and he mixed them up with some of his own life and his own people, but the way it came across is the way people would respond to a social worker.

### *Medium Cool*

Harold

Hello.

Social worker

Hello. Is your mother home?

Harold

Yes. No.

Social worker

Is she working?

Harold

Yes.

Social worker

What time will she be home?

Harold

At twelve.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Having had some knowledge for him to draw on his own character was the way we worked with him.



**Jonathan Haze**

We got a call from Harold's father. There were problems in the neighbourhood. We pulled up in this Channel 8 station wagon, and of course everybody wondered what we were doing. We walked right through this bunch of crazy Hillbillies and up the back steps to Harold's house. We grabbed him and took him right through those people into the station wagon and back down to the Sherman Hotel. We needed him to shoot the next day.

**Verna Bloom**

He was told he had to take a shower.

**Steven North**

Harold had never really seen a shower before. Michael Butler came over to Bob Forster's apartment and actually created the scene there for Harold. Michael was the poet laureate of the film. He was always there with his pen in hand to help Haskell out because a lot was being improvised as we were shooting. Michael came up with the idea of putting a scene when Harold discovers a shower for the first time. Bob Forster was showing Harold around the apartment and brought him to the shower, and it was a real discovery, because Harold had actually never seen a stall shower before. When he is shot in the shower, he is really having the time of his life. It could only be done once because we could never capture that amazement in the child's face a second time.

**Jonathan Haze**

We didn't want to pay him upfront because we didn't know what would happen, if the family would leave town. They didn't have any money, so we were putting away something every week for him, whatever union scale was at the time. After ten weeks it added up to a pretty good amount of money.

**Verna Bloom**

There was just something about him that was really special. There was something sad about him though. I was trying to get close to him but it was very hard. He always had his guard up in a way. I couldn't ever really get as close to him as I would have wanted to. There were ways I tried to develop a relationship between the two of us. I took him to the zoo and they had this little baby elephant out there, and he went right up to the elephant and pulled out one of its hairs. It wasn't a gesture of antagonism, it was just something he wanted to do, so he did it.

**Jonathan Haze**

His point of view of life was just so different from anybody else I'd talked to before. Coming from the hills of West Virginia to the big city of Chicago. They never unpacked. Their suitcases were just around the living room still packed because they were ready to go back as soon as the mines opened and there was work.

### **Steven North**

One night I brought Harold to a restaurant in downtown Chicago, a rib house. It was like taking him to a different world. He had never been to downtown Chicago. Harold was taken out of the ghetto, he was taken out for six weeks. He lived a different life, he saw a different way of life. His clothes were changed, his diet was changed, he had an exciting adventure. And then when it was over, he was sent back. His youth is captured in this film and his energy, and that the great quality of the film. And the tragedy is that I don't think any of us know where Harold is today.

## Moving with the Firepoints

### Ian Christie

The film tunes in and out of its narrative, and this idea of a kind of low-density narrative is very important at this time. You find it in Godard, for instance, where the films seems to deviate, wander from side to side. It's more a documentary about the state of France than it is a story about any characters that we follow. And yet the characters come back just enough to anchor us in the film. It's exactly what Wexler's doing in *Medium Cool*. There are passages in the film where we wonder, "Has he forgotten about the narrative? Where are the characters?"

### *Medium Cool*

Gus	Why are you working for Kennedy?
Kennedy kids	He's great! He's got long hair.

### Ian Christie

It's edited in blocks. There are these very interesting sections where you can see this has been constructed as a block. It's not being edited according to fiction principles at all. It's being edited as a group of shots which are presenting layered, conflicting points of view. Then we get a narrative section, then we get another block.

### Haskell Wexler

Paul Golding had a very, very free hand in editing *Medium Cool*. In fact he made the movie. I'm very poor at editing or arranging, even on a documentary film that I shoot. I think everything is great and precious and I can't stand if they cut out a dolly shot or a good zoom or a proper change of focus, and I needed someone with Paul Golding's sensibility to make a movie.

### Paul Golding

There was a whole episode in which Verna's character became politically involved because of Peggy Terry.

### *Medium Cool* out-take

Eileen	Peggy, what does that mean? That "black brother" thing.
Peggy Terry	That's a black guy who was shot down on the street, on the west side. He is a brother because the same thing happens to our young white guys in this neighbourhood, southern guys.
Eileen	Don't you feel kind of funny. I mean because he's black.
Peggy Terry	No. I think than when people start getting shot down together it's about time we forget about colour.
Eileen	Can I see some of those other things you got there?

Peggy Terry Sure. This is one we're going to take to Resurrection City. This is for the Poor People's Campaign. Have you heard about that?

Eileen Ah-huh.

Peggy Terry Do you think you might be able to go?

Eileen I couldn't get off work.

Peggy Terry Be nice if you could go. If you have to work, you have to work.

Eileen They wouldn't pay me if I didn't work.

Peggy Terry Right.

Eileen What else you got?

Peggy Terry Well, that's all black people now. The SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. That's for the Poor People's Campaign too. That's the black people.

Eileen What do you do with all these?

Peggy Terry Well, I had them on the wall but I'm fixing to paint so I took them down. That's why they're piled on the table. This is one from Appalachia. That's Charleston, West Virginia. That's your home state.

Eileen What's this ADCU?

Peggy Terry I don't know what that is. Some people gave me this. I don't know what that means. Well, there are taxes and roads. That must be their problems down there. Welfare, taxes and getting roads.

Eileen That's nice. What this one here?

Peggy Terry Oh, that's old Jim Crow himself.

Eileen Oh, that's funny.

**Paul Siegel**

Crucial to JOIN's identity was to develop interracial solidarity between whites and, in particular, whites from the South who were in Uptown, and African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans in Uptown in Chicago. That was JOIN's vision.

***Medium Cool* out-take – Eileen and [?]**

Eileen What were you telling me about the welfare programme?

[?] I was explaining to you about the National Welfare Rights. Now the National Welfare Rights is an organisation that organizes and connects poor people around the country, and welfare recipients. They do all our research for us, and let us know about the laws and the rules and the regulations on welfare around the country, in each state. Now this is very good, you know, because it gives poor people something to really hold

onto and to really bite into, and something to really call their own. And it really encourages them to organize, because we know a whole lot of people are strong, and this is what we're trying to get going around the country. Oh, and by the way, I would like to tell you, I went down to West Virginia and London, Kentucky.

Eileen Oh, you went to West Virginia? That's where I come from.

[?] Is that so? Well I went down there two days, and I put together a welfare organisation while I was down there.

Eileen Down in West Virginia?

[?] Yes, down in West Virginia, and also in London, Kentucky. Now, I went down there. Those people down there, they work in the mine and they become disabled at a very early age, like around fifty, fifty-five years old. They work in the mines, and they get a lot of sand and stuff in their lungs, and they become disabled. Well, then, what they're trying to do the people that become disabled is push them in the lake and drown them, see? But after all they worked that time, they're entitled to a living. So I went down there and put together a welfare recipient group, and what really happened is I just let those people know what kind of bag they were in, and when they found out what kind of bag they were in I put the organisations together and I named them.

Eileen Well, does that help the people? I mean the ones that get hurt in the mines?

[?] Well, yes, because they have to live. They're sick and they're not able to work, and they can't go back into the mines. They're poor people and they really don't know anything else but the mines.

Eileen So they get money?

[?] Sure, they've got to live.

Eileen Where do you get the money from, though?

[?] You get the money from the welfare department. In fact, it's their own money. They have worked for this country and made this country rich. You know, this country has gotten rich off of slave labour, see? And all these people are doing is getting back dues that they're entitled to. If they'd gotten paid for they work they did while they were working, they wouldn't have to be welfare recipients. See, in other words, rich people get it too, but they call it a subsidy. And when we get it, it's welfare. You see what I mean. So that's one of the big

things. And this is what we're trying to get over to the poor people, and once we get organized, baby, we're going to bring about a change.

Eileen  
[?] How can somebody like me do any good, though?  
When you learn what kind of bag you're in. See, this is what's going to do good. When people learn about the power structure and how this country's set up, and how you're treated by the power structure, and when you learn it, then you're going to get mad about it. And you're sure enough going to get mad about it, because you're just as mad as the power structure and look what they did to you. You're an outcast.

Eileen  
[?] But getting mad about it doesn't do any good.  
Well, getting mad about it motivates you to move, and when you really get organized you're going to be motivated to move. And when you get motivated, you're going to tell somebody else about it. See, and this is where the thing goes around the country, because everybody's organized. When people get organized, that's when they're going to change the thing themselves.  
Is that what you're trying to do, too?

Eileen  
Peggy Terry Yes.  
Eileen You don't work with each other, do you?  
Peggy Terry Yes, we do work together. The groups that she was talking about that she set up down home were white people.

[?] White people, down in the Appalachian mines. Those were white people.

Eileen How come you went to help the white people?  
[?] Because they're in the same boat I am and I want to let them know that.

### **Paul Golding**

She went with Peggy to several scenes, one of which was a speech by Jesse Jackson. It was a great piece of oratory, he was at the top of his form. I think he happens to be one of the better American orators, whatever you think of him politically.

### **Francis Ward**

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was founded by Reverend Martin Luther King to carry on the work of direct-action, non-violent protest against legalized segregation. The basis of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were southern Black ministers. Bedrock support and membership mainly came from African-American churches, primarily in the South. At some point, the Reverend Dr. King founded an economic subsidiary of SCLC called Operation Breadbasket.

Operation Breadbasket was an economic unit whose primary focus would be to try to win jobs and other concessions from businesses that had been part of the system of racial discrimination against African-Americans. The Reverend Jesse Jackson, a rising star amongst Civil Rights leaders in the 1960s, was the president of Operation Breadbasket. One of its main weapons was selective boycott and picketing of stores that Operation Breadbasket thought had a record of historic discrimination against blacks in hiring, selling products, and in promotion of blacks, and perhaps other ways.

### **Thomas Jackson**

The idea of “selective patronage,” otherwise known as Operation Breadbasket, had its origins in Philadelphia in the early 1960s, with Reverend Sullivan. They took it to Atlanta where Reverend Bennett refined the tactic. Jesse Jackson really carried it to the north and to a national level in Chicago.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take – Jesse Jackson**

On behalf of the Ministers of Operation Breadbasket, and our many brothers and sisters who are gathered here today, and the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, I greet you today as we prepare for battle plans and more methods to solve the A&P challenge.

### **Francis Ward**

The A&P supermarket chain was one of the stores that was targeted for action by Operation Breadbasket during the 1960s.

### **Thomas Jackson**

The Atlantic and Pacific Grocery Company – A&P – was a big supermarket chain. Jackson coordinated thousands of people to boycott those stores until places where black people shopped actually could work. It was a simple formula that worked on a large scale.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take – Jesse Jackson**

I come to you today with a heavy heart and confused mind because there is so much dangerous stuff going down. Some of us have taken it very lightly. It's no accident that what happened in Cleveland happened there. Really what happened in Cleveland was the effect of an original cause. Those boys were not some violent fools who desired to see men shot. As a matter of fact, they were loyal enough at one point in their lives, to go to the army and defend this nation for freedom. They could not receive their paycheck and the bank was bankrupt. There was no federal insurance to pick up the bill. They decided to tear the bank down. Somebody's responsible for delivering money when you put it in the bank. It didn't happen there. Somebody has to be sensitive to the whole tone of television, in terms of black people and guerrilla

warfare. What must we do next? You all understand what I'm saying? Now, we must address ourselves to this very frankly and very bluntly. The same police mentality that abused people in Cleveland is the same mentality that abused last Calvin here last Saturday.

Behaviour has to be the way a man acts, not the way a man looks. Who's going to determine the way he looks? He couldn't determine who his parents were. Can't determine tomorrow. Can't determine when he's going to die. And most of us don't even know why we live. You all hear what I'm saying?

### **Paul Golding**

It was difficult to cut the scenes with Jesse Jackson out of the film, but we had to get the film down to a specific length, and in order to do that we had to remove some sections of the film entirely. One whole section showed how Verna Bloom's character was evolving from a person who was an assembly line worker into someone who was becoming politically aware because of the people who were in her neighbourhood.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take – Jesse Jackson**

The black preacher from Woodlawn was running from the Keystone Rangers. There was a [inaudible] standing up. I don't want to glorify him out of proportion but I want you to know that he stood up. Many of us were in Chicago talking about we were free. There was a Goodman and Schwerner floating at the bottom of the Mississippi River. Many of us were talking about the movement was over. There was a Jonathan Daniels accepting bullets in his back. But other men might stand up. Black folk are talking about the way to be a good American is to join the army and help kill enemies. There was an A. J. Muste rising on the horizon saying man shouldn't study war any more. He picked it up from Isaiah, then by the SCLC, and that's why I'm glad today to be a part of an organisation that does not deal in profit based on colour, P-R-O-F-I-T, but deals in prophecy, based upon vision. Our argument here is not with black domination but with black emancipation. We want to be free in a free world.

### **Ian Christie**

*Medium Cool* comes out of the moment when filmmakers started shooting enormous quantities of footage, not at all sure how they would use it, how they would edit it into anything manageable. How do you make something of these hours and hours of material. How are you going to edit it into something linear that can actually be shown on television or in a cinema.



### ***Medium Cool* out-take – Peggy Terry**

We've got to learn to stick together. We've got to stop fighting each other. That's what I tell people every day. We've got to stop fighting. Black people don't care if you don't love them. Just quit kicking them and quit cutting off your own nose to spite your face.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take – Jesse Jackson**

My point is, he pulled them in on one position, and it got him killed. It got him in trouble with the Jewish church. It got him in church with the ecclesiastical authorities. He said that when I rise, I know it's not talk. But when I rise, I will throw all men. Not Jewish men. I know that Jews are under Roman suppression. Needed that Jewish identity. I know that barbarians are neglected because they cannot read nor write. In the final analysis, when men will have been exposed to truth, there is no such thing as an untrained ear of the truth. So often a man who is uneducated and crippled has a better chance to hear truth than a man who is superficially educated and blocks it out.

### **Paul Golding**

There were stories, subplots that had to be removed to shorten the film down to a reasonably releasable version.

### **Steven North**

Haskell was someone who was ready to move with the headlines. Haskell was ready to go wherever there was a firepoint because he knew this was going to be a part of *Medium Cool*. He wanted to make a movie based on a book he was given, *The Concrete Wilderness*, and not make that movie at all, so he was ready to go wherever events led him in 1968. The first real event of the summer of 1968 was the Resurrection City, one of the first Marches on Washington of the poor blacks and poor whites coming together and camping in front of the Washington Memorial.

### **Archive – voiceover**

In May 1968 a Poor People's Campaign converged on Washington. It was led by the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, successor to the Rev. Martin Luther King who had died a month earlier, from an assassin's bullet. Like most of the marches on the nation's capital – Coxey's Army in 1894, the Bonus War Veterans in 1932, and the 1963 march – it was in the name of a better share of the American dream. Its purpose was to dramatise the needs of the country's poor, and in particular impress those needs upon the Congress. A deep awareness of the needs of poor people was central to all the President's domestic efforts during his years in office.

### **Peggy Terry**

Resurrection City was in Washington D.C. alongside The Mall, standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, we were the right of the Reflecting Pool. Reverend King planned it as a protest to let the government know that there were people who were starving, people with no vote, still on plantations. It was to let the government know that we wanted change.

### **Thomas Jackson**

King hoped to build a city where the poor people could live, but as a launching pad, as a platform, for them to engage in sustained disruption and civil disobedience of the national government. Sit-ins in the agencies, sit-ins in the halls of Congress, at the White House. His vision was of something that would have the impact of a major riot, but that would be non-violent. Resurrection City, though, became the centrepiece and after King's assassination the plans and hopes for massive civil disobedience gave way to the logistical problem and difficulties they had subsisting two thousand people at the National Mall in a makeshift plywood tent encampment.

### **Arthur Marwick**

In contrast with the 1963 March on Washington – which Martin Luther King very much focused on the issue of the day, Civil Rights – the 1968 March on Washington had switched to basic economic issues. It was about jobs for blacks and it was about housing for blacks, so it was social and economic rather than purely about Civil Rights.

### **Thomas Jackson**

King had a lifelong concern with class inequality as well as racism. The notion that only in the last three years of his life did he come to have a concern about poverty and mobilising poor people for economic justice, that's actually not so true. In the March on Washington there are claims for jobs and higher wages and decent housing. Strategically he went from desegregating public places to earning the vote and that culminating moment in Selma, when they marched from Montgomery to Selma, just before the Voting Rights Act he made a speech saying we're not going to stop marching. We're going to march on poverty.

### **Archive – Martin Luther King**

The other thing I want you to understand is this: it didn't cost the nation one penny to integrate lunch counters. It didn't cost the nation one penny to guarantee the right to vote. But now we are dealing with issues that cannot be solved without the nation spending billions of dollars and undergoing a radical redistribution of economic power.

**Thomas Jackson**

His concern for economic justice is always there but it emerges when strategic victories over segregation and disenfranchisement in the South are won. It also emerges at the same time when Lyndon Johnson is trying to conduct a war on poverty at the same time as he is escalating the war in Vietnam, the latter of which is undermining that former effort tremendously.

**Francis Ward**

It was one of the main pieces of work that Dr. King was active in before he was assassinated. He felt very strongly that the Civil Rights movement had to move into a whole area of economic empowerment and economic justice. Dr. King knew that if the Civil Rights movement was to continue to have meaning and relevance to African-Americans as well as poor whites and others who were interested in social justice, that it had to address issues related to the economic inequality that was endemic to the American system.

**Peggy Terry**

It was called the Poor People's Campaign, but then after Reverend King was killed, Reverend Abernathy took up the battle and we named it Resurrection City.

**Leonard Weinglass**

Resurrection City was Martin Luther King's attempt to influence legislation in Washington that would recognise the plight of the poor in America at a time when America was experiencing extraordinary prosperity. What King was trying to do was to physically make them a presence that couldn't be ignored.

**Alan Brinkley**

The Poor People's Movement was meant to be an interracial movement that would march to Washington and would try to protest the dismantling of the Great Society and the War on Poverty that was then in progress because of the Vietnam War.

**Peggy Terry**

I had a lot of the southern whites there so they could understand and see that we were in the same boat as black people and that racism was silly and self-defeating.

**Leonard Weinglass**

Jesse Jackson was there at the time. He was a young minister and Operation Push, which was his operation out of Chicago, was very much a part of Resurrection City and the Poor People's Campaign.

**Peggy Terry**

He'd wake us up every morning on this bullhorn. We were about ready to choke him. "I am somebody! I am somebody!" My God, can't you be somebody a little later in the day!

### **Thomas Jackson**

Jesse Jackson was one of among four or five men who tried to inherit King's mantle of leadership and were vying within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for visibility and the prime leadership position, Ralph Abernathy being the formal president. Jesse Jackson was there with a very savvy agenda. He led a contingent of poor people right into the cafeteria of the Department of Agriculture. Everybody took as much as they wanted. Jackson asked the cashier to send the bill to the President.

### **Arthur Marwick**

Jesse Jackson is a very interesting figure. You have to realise that he belongs to a totally different generation from Martin Luther King and his associates. He's only twenty-seven at the time of Resurrection City, and he had a tremendous power to enthuse people when I think, to be honest, some people were beginning to feel perhaps that Martin Luther King anyway was a little bit old hat and belonged to very strongly religious older ideas, whereas I think Jesse Jackson was in touch with the younger generation and his role at Resurrection City was to create enthusiasm when with all that damned rain people were flagging.

### **Peter Bonerz**

Bob Forster and I were at Resurrection City. It was awful. It was raining and terribly muddy, people were living in tents. We were meant to be shooting news stuff. Well, there wasn't any news happening. What was happening was that it was raining, it was muddy and the people were parked in Washington D.C. to show how economically disenfranchised people lived, in the rain, in the mud, in tents. So that's what we shot: the rain, the mud, the tents, the walking, the disenfranchised people.

### **Alan Brinkley**

One of the features of the Poor People's March was a great public demonstration in front of the Lincoln Memorial where, of course, the famous March on Washington had occurred five years earlier in 1963 when King gave his "I have a dream" speech. If the 1963 March on Washington was the highwater mark of the Civil Rights movement, the Poor People's March which occurred in the Summer of 1968, in the same place, was perhaps one of the low moments of the Civil Rights movement because the crowd was a fraction of what it had been in 1963. There was no one with the stature and charisma or the oratorical powers of King. In 1963 the march had the support of labour unions, of most Democrats, of the President. In 1968 it had really no outside support at all. So the whole Poor People's Movement from the demonstration in front of the Lincoln Memorial to the squalid village that was built on the Mall was a kind of sad illustration of how the Civil Rights movement, which had once been such an inspiring and widely supported phenomenon, had lost favour with so much of American society, and even lost favour with some of its own original constituents.

### **Archive – voiceover**

Heavy rains and unrealistic demands brought mud and disaffection to what was supposed to have been a city of hope. The energies of its leadership were diverted from crusading against poverty to restraining militant agitators. During its existence, the Johnson administration kept a close watch over developments in Resurrection City. High government officials, including cabinet officers, held meetings with the demonstrators to listen to their grievances and try to work out solutions to many of their problems. On June 19, more than fifty thousand people gathered between the Washington and Lincoln monuments for a nine-hour peaceful demonstration of solidarity with the nation's poor. It was capstone event of the Poor People's Campaign, begun two months before. But even at the voices of reasons spoke non-violence and restraint to this gathering, seeds of discontent were taking root in the camp itself. Tensions and discord continued until, after many arrests and increasing violence, it was finally decided by government officials to not extend for a second time the permit sanctioning Resurrection City. On June 24, park and District of Columbia police began dismantling the wooden huts and lean-tos. When they left, the demonstrators had not achieved their immediate goals, but they had received a fair hearing from their government, even from a Congress reluctant to appropriate additional funds to poverty programs to whom they had addressed their major demands.

### **Thomas Jackson**

Resurrection City, at least in the eyes of the media, becomes the central story, and it becomes an increasingly negative story in their eyes. As time went on, this encampment literally sank in a sea of mud.

### **Peter Bonerz**

It was mud, it was rain, it was disenfranchised poor people with their dogs. It was boring. News can't be boring in the United States.

### **Robert Forster**

Two sets of boots walking in different directions in the mud. "Which direction do we go, where is it?"

### ***Medium Cool***

Gus

Behind the Mexicans, aren't they?

John

Gee, I don't know, I heard they were behind the San Francisco contingent. This direction here.

Gus

Are you sure? It was a blue tent.

**Robert Forster**

That was dialogue that later on, when I heard it, I thought, “You might have been a little smarter than what you said. You could have thought of something better than that.” But that was the very first stuff we did, Washington D.C. I hadn’t a clue, at that point, that I was expected to just invent it. Shooting on this picture was always interesting, always improvisational. We shot the script, but if the script was this much, we shot that much stuff.

**Paul Golding**

You have to understand that when Haskell wrote the screenplay, he had someone in mind to play that part: John Cassavetes. John wasn’t able to do it because of obligations to do a film of his own. Cassavetes would have been brilliant. His background of improvisation, his ability to cope with material and bring that incredible power of his performance to it would have made it a great performance, and it would have made it a whole different film.

**Peter Bonerz**

At the time, and I think still, Bob wasn’t an improviser. Great actors very often can’t improvise. Likewise, people who can improvise aren’t necessarily great actors.

**Robert Forster**

This was brand new to me. I had only done a couple of movies and one of them I didn’t talk. I had two lines in *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. In this picture suddenly I am a central figure. Early on it was a big surprise to me that I was to supply a personal point of view.

**Paul Golding**

In terms of his ability, his chops to do that particular thing that Haskell needed desperately for someone to do for him, because he couldn’t coax it out of someone who couldn’t do it, because as brilliant as Haskell is, that requires a whole level of brilliance that I don’t think many have. It showed up immediately when they came back from Resurrection City.

**Robert Forster**

I was starting slow, but those were the moment at which I said, “This is going to take more than learning the lines and trying not to bump into the furniture.”

**Paul Golding**

He wasn’t able to go beyond the parameters of what had been specifically written and his improvisations didn’t work, frankly, and Haskell was the first one to admit that and to be very pained by it, and to not know how to deal with it.

**Haskell Wexler**

I liked his working class attitude, his appearance and so forth, but sometimes he did feel a little punchy. Not too smart, not as responsive as I would like to think the cameraman was.

**Steven North**

I believe it was Michael Butler who said, “Well listen, why don’t we turn him into an ex-boxer? And then you’ll have an excuse for it, for the movie.”

**Paul Golding**

I remember the conversation perfectly. I remember the phone call. Haskell called me in my hotel room and said, “I got it! I’m going to make him a boxer.”

**Robert Forster**

Every once in a while Haskell would say, “Guess what. I came up with an idea. You were talking at the kitchen table about boxing.”

*Medium Cool*

Eileen

Where are you from?

John

Right here, Chicago. CYO welterweight boxer 1958.

**Robert Forster**

Haskell said, “I planned a day or two at this boxing gym where we shot some totally improvised stuff.”

*Medium Cool*

John

You see, really the object is to knock the other guy’s brains out. And then you win.

**Robert Forster**

My father said that to me and I thought it pertinent.

**Haskell Wexler**

I liked Robert Forster’s quality. He felt like a real guy. He was perhaps less skilled as an actor than John Cassavetes would be, but I really liked him. I didn’t want to have a guy who was really aware of all the psychological and political subtleties that were going on. I didn’t want him overtly struggling with the question of “Am I involved or am I not involved?” I wanted it to feel integral with the story. I think he did an excellent job.

**Ian Christie**

There was a kind of blurring between professional actors and ordinary people going on right through the Sixties, and *Medium Cool* really picks up on that, because it has people who really are actors behaving as if they're not actors. It has actors of different types all thrown together. It's trying to create the illusion of spontaneous reality. And what helps that is that many of those actors have not come up through the conservatoire, through drama school, but through improvisation. Chicago was a wonderful city in the late Sixties for new theatre, and that was the theatre of political cabaret, satire, of Second City. Peter Bonerz, who is quite central to the film, comes right out of that and probably was able to permeate the film with his influence.

**Peter Bonerz**

The thing that I understood very quickly about Haskell is that he wasn't a traditional director as I had understood and still understand directors in that he didn't feel comfortable or didn't have much experience working with actors.

**Steven North**

Peter Bonerz who had been part of Second City, which was a very avant-garde theatre group in Chicago, worked with the actors on all of their improvisations.

**Peter Bonerz**

Getting actors in a small, tight room, and working with them to get the most out of a scene. Haskell wasn't able to help much because he had no experience doing it. I think it made him uncomfortable because actors would turn to him and say, "What do you want me to do?"

**Steven North**

Bonerz probably brought what Haskell had hoped Cassavetes would bring, working with the actors in improv and making the improvisational scenes really seem alive.

**Peter Bonerz**

He asked me, "Why don't you take the actors the night before and sort of work with them and answer whatever questions they might have. We've got this script but feel free to monkey with the script."

**Ron Vargas**

The reason we could shoot documentary style is because the film and lenses got faster which allowed us to shoot with less light. The technology let us do it at that time. We couldn't do it prior to that because everything was too slow. If you're out shooting with an ASA of 25 or 50 it's very difficult to make it look natural. The reason we had to light was because the ASA was 50, so you had to light. You



wouldn't get anything on the negative if you didn't. We used as many practical lights as we could. We used the available light coming through windows. We took space blankets and put them on the ceiling, and we could bounce into the space blankets. That would give an ambient, a fill light. The key lights were all coming from the window source and we were trying to shoot in not 360 degrees but 300 degrees so we gave the actors freedom. It worked very well and it looked very natural. It had, I think, a very rich quality to it, a very "You're There" quality. The first ASA 100 5254 I used was with Haskell on *Medium Cool*. Now all of a sudden you've got an ASA of 100 and everybody just went crazy. Haskell and I went to Chicago to get the first case of ASA 100 and brought it back. The roller rink was shot in the Olympic Auditorium with their lighting and the ASA 100.

### **Ian Christie**

The new cameras had larger magazines, they were easy to re-load, fast and under pressure. This meant you didn't have to break off and interrupt the flow of events happening around you.

### **Ron Vargas**

We used Eclairs which weren't used for sound. At that time Carroll Ballard was a director of photography and had developed a blimp for the Éclair, and Haskell bought the blimps. Then he had thousand foot mags made because the re-loading time, taking the camera out of the blimp and putting it in, was time-consuming. So we had Eclairs with thousand foot mags inside of a blimp. First time.

### **Mike Gray**

The camera that existed before, you had to un-bolt the magazine from the camera once the film had run through and was in one of those chambers on top of the camera. You had to put that inside a black bag, zip it up and put your hands inside the black bag and open the camera up in absolute darkness, take that roll of film out, put it into a can, seal the can, then take out another can and open the can and put the new film in the camera and thread it out, ready to be put on the camera. Then you close the two magazines, take your hands out and unzip the bag. First you take out the can of film that's already shot because the last thing you want to do is blow that. You've already spent some time on it. So you take that out and carefully take out the magazine, remount it on top of the camera, bolt it into place, and then thread it through the mechanism. There's a mechanism inside that camera that has to be handled perfectly. When you're ready you shoot a little short piece to make sure it's functioning. Then you're ready to go. By then, of course, you have either been beaten into the ground by the cops or the mob is six blocks away.

**Steven North**

We went back to California, and no sooner did we get back that Haskell resumed writing the script knowing that he would find a way to incorporate Resurrection City. Then the assassination of Robert Kennedy took place.

***Medium Cool* outtake – Robert Kennedy assassination**

**Steven North**

This was the great vision of Haskell Wexler because he was able to take the events that were going on, and of course none of us could have guessed that Kennedy would have been assassinated. But he used that, and incorporated it into the film. Kennedy had been assassinated in a hotel kitchen in Los Angeles, California after giving an election speech, and he was really expected to win the election. It was all brought to an end in this kitchen.

***Medium Cool* – Robert Kennedy**

My thanks to all of you! Now it's on to Chicago and let's win the election!

**Steven North**

The dramatic moment of his killing is represented in a hotel kitchen. This we actually did in Chicago. Everybody in 1968 would have know what Haskell was trying to portray.

**Alan Brinkley**

It wasn't simply the fact that Robert Kennedy was dead, it was the fact that this kind of violence seemed now, to many people, to be endemic in American life. The assassination of Robert Kennedy was widely interpreted at the time as a kind of generalised sickness in American life. Whereas after Kennedy's assassination there was the Warren Commission to study the Kennedy assassination, after Robert Kennedy's assassination there was Presidential Commission on Violence which was not designed to study the circumstances of Robert Kennedy's assassination, but was designed to study the larger social illness that presumably had created it.

**Steven North**

After having shot in Resurrection City we were fortunate enough to be able to go back to Washington D.C. for the funeral of Robert F. Kennedy.

***Medium Cool***

Taxi driver

You guys here to cover the funeral?

Gus

Yeah, that's what we're here for.

**Peter Bonerz**

Haskell called us and said, “We’re going to Washington.” Bob Forster and I were like news reporters. The boss calls and says “You’re going to Washington D.C.,” so we got on a plane and went to Washington D.C. They threw some equipment at us and we go out and make-believe we were news photographers. It was easy for us to make-believe we were news photographers because we had this stuff, we knew the switches, and we sat around waiting for stuff to happen. The rush to get from the airport, the rush to get from the hotel room out on the street was quite ironic because nothing happened, and I think there are out-takes of us waiting for something to happen, which it didn’t. What was happening was all around us. In an historical context there was a lot happening, in the immediacy of news photography it wasn’t a car crash: nothing was happening.

## “They were doing theatre”

### **General Richard Dunn**

I was called by the Adjutant General of Illinois in June of 1968 at a time when the Emergency Operation headquarters was doing its annual field training. It was at the Chicago Avenue Armoury that year because of the impending problems that were expected in connection with the Convention. The Adjutant General was contacted by Haskell Wexler who was producing a film that was supposed to be of a documentary type. Haskell set up the appointment when he would come to the armoury and interview me. I got on my Class A uniform and I simply stood in front of the camera and said...

### ***Medium Cool* – General Richard Dunn**

I am Brigadier General Richard T. Dunn, Commanding General of the Emergency Operation Headquarters of the Illinois Army National Guard.

### **General Richard Dunn**

And the mission of the Emergency Operations headquarters is to plan and deal with civil disturbances that can occur in the city.

### ***Medium Cool* outtake – General Richard Dunn**

I think we are all very much aware of the fact that our government, founded on the constitution, provides more freedoms, and provides protection for those freedoms, to a greater extent than any other form of government that exists now or that has existed, to the best of my knowledge. But, with reference to that provision, and all these liberties that are granted to our citizens, there necessarily results a great responsibility to obey the law and to have respect for law and order in the United States. Everyone is protected with reference to the freedom, but in exercising the particular freedom, and particularly freedom of speech, of course, the right must be exercised in a manner which does not infringe upon the person or property of another individual so as to deprive him of rights to which he is entitled under the law. If we do not observe this responsibility and obey the laws which protect other people, then we can't expect to exercise those rights in a manner that permit anything without restriction of any kind. We've seen a development in the United States through the last several years which has been tolerated as time goes on to the point now where, I think, a reaction is setting in and responsible citizens realise once again that they cannot be tolerant of the exercise of a freedom to the point where they permit it to develop almost into a state of anarchy that would eventually result in a complete lack of control by the government. The thing that most governments are trying to do at the present time is find the point at which they can permit these freedoms to be exercised and at the same time control them and insist upon respect for law and order so that the rights of other people are not destroyed or infringed. Now, where does the National Guard fit into this picture?

Well, the essential responsibility for the enforcement of law and order rests with municipal police, county sheriff's departments, state police, and is entirely within the hands of the state. Normally, the National Guard isn't called upon to help carry out this function unless local authorities are unable to maintain control at the time a disturbance might develop. And it's at that point in time that local authorities are privileged to ask the state to provide assistance in enforcing order, and the state usually does this through the National Guard. The National Guard comes in. In the state of Illinois, they report to the civil authority who has asked for assistance. The civil authority gives the National Guard commander a mission, stated briefly, it might be to restore law and order within a certain geographical area within a city, and then the National Guard commander takes that mission and, by use of his troops, does what he thinks is necessary to restore law and order in the particular area that's been assigned to him. He does this in cooperation and coordination with local police and authorities, and eventually, of course, through the additional military force, law and order would be restored. And then, over a relatively short period of time, the military control would be relinquished to the civilian authorities who, once again, are able to govern in their own municipality without assistance from the state military authority.

#### **General Richard Dunn**

That's the last time I saw Haskell Wexler or had any contact with him. From there I understand he went to Camp Ripley, Minnesota and took pictures of troops training.

#### **Dan Hallin**

They assumed – and for the most part they were right – that the journalists would portray them in a positive way, and they didn't see any reason most of the time to be suspicious that allowing cameras there would be detrimental to their interests. That is a point of view, the idea that you have to keep the cameras away because this is going to cause controversy, that's a post-Vietnam view, or a late-Vietnam view.

#### **Neil Hickey**

In Vietnam there was no censorship of any kind. If you had two credentials around your neck – one from the Pentagon and one from the South Vietnamese government – you could go anywhere in the country. You could get on any military plane and fly anywhere you liked and talk to anyone you liked: grants in the field, General Westmoreland, anybody. There were no restrictions. There was no way to impose restrictions. In World War II, censorship was a common thing because the military controlled the means of communication. You had to file through the military and they censored. It was routine. Everybody accepted that. In Vietnam there was absolutely none of that. Reporters were free to go anywhere and do anything and talk to anybody. The Pentagon saw to it that this never happened again.

**Michael Arlen**

The memory of the Second World War was if you were military person and you saw a correspondent coming towards you, you could only gain from that exchange. It was a great mutual benefit deal. In Vietnam the military suddenly realise, “Oh my god! The rules have been turned upside down because now I see a correspondent, and I run the other way.”

**Haskell Wexler**

I had heard that they were training for the Convention, so then I knew that the plans for my script were probably true. The training of the National Guard sequence was fairly easy to shoot. You have to remember that in 1968 the government and the general system was not so picture wise, not so TV wise. Television was still pretty new, and the idea that someone from the outside with a camera could film what they were doing was not considered a potential threat or did not need control. So we just filmed them, and what you see was what they did, we never told anyone what to do in any way.

**General Richard Dunn**

It was based on an historical standard and pattern of training, and what those units would do would be to take a certain number of men from the unit and dress them in civilian clothing, as demonstrators, so they looked just as much as possible as those people who were encountered on the street. While they tried to create a problem and cause a disturbance, the National Guardsmen would be trained in what they should do to counteract that activity.

**Robert Forster**

It wasn't real, we knew it. There was a lot of kidding around. The National Guard was broken into bad guys and good guys, and the bad guys had all the fun. The good guys had to be restrained and had to do the things properly. The bad guys had water balloons and were provocative and had fun and joked and it was sort of a fun little exercise. There was no actual danger so Peter Bonerz and I had run of the joint. We had cameras, they treated us like the journalists they expected to accompany these events. No one had any problems with us jumping up on troop carriers or anything. As far as I'm concerned it was a lark. Things got serious only later on.

**Peter Bonerz**

They were preparing for drug-crazed hippies and violent maddened black street race rioters who were going to set fire to the city. What they weren't prepared for were ministers of the cloth, middle-aged housewives, octogenarian retired teachers and mothers with babies, which is actually the kind of demonstration that occurred in Chicago a couple of months later.

**Haskell Wexler**

They were doing theatre, they were acting. They were making fiction, wearing their false wigs and acting like hippies and so forth. That was all their preparation, but it was also show. The whole idea of theatre and of showing and presenting ideas in dramatic theatrical ways was something that the anti-war movement knew very well with Abbie Hoffman and the theatricality of the actions that were taken to get the attention of the media.

**Peter Bonerz**

Half of them were drinking make-believe beer with make-believe funny costumes. The other ones had make-believe guns and they were antagonising themselves in a make-believe way. You don't see in their faces the kind of fear and dread that you see later on in real Chicago where they didn't know what they were going to do. Then they had real guns with real bullets in real chambers. What were they going to do? Shoot their cousins?

**Haskell Wexler**

Everyone's putting a show on for somebody, probably in our culture for television otherwise you're ignored. If you're not on television, you don't exist.

**Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970**

There is an obligation to put on a good show. When you put something on television, truth is not enough. It has to be dramatic or constructed. It has to be drama. And in the course of doing that, oftentimes, truth suffers.

## The Former Invisible Man Lives

### *Medium Cool* out-take

Jonathan Haze                    Guy must be some kind of a freak. For ten thousand bucks, he could buy enough pot and pills to stay high for the rest of his life.

Barber                                Where'd he find it?

Jonathan Haze                    He found it in a cab.

Barber                                He should have kept five and turned five in, at least that would have made him half-honest. Nobody would have ever known the difference.

Jonathan Haze                    Hey, listen, don't take too much off back there, will you? I'm going to the policeman's ball. I don't want to look like one of them.

Barber                                Not Chicago, I hope.

Jonathan Haze                    Yeah, sure.

Barber                                I'd like to know who the guy was that left it in the car.

Jonathan Haze                    Who cares? If he had ten thousand to lose, he deserves to lose it.

### Leonard Weinglass

What's really surprising, and it's a real tribute to Haskell, is that in most American filmmaking, the filmmakers are not familiar with the subtlety and the historical nature of race relations and they certainly fail to project it on the screen. Haskell, being a political person, who is deeply involved in issues of race and has been for most of his life, was able to project in *Medium Cool* the reality of the interaction between the races, as exemplified in that scene when the filmmakers come to the apartment.

### Paula Massood

*Medium Cool* really does provide us with one clear and rare example of African-American politics onscreen at this time. It's a politics that is quite complex and thought out, that thinks historically in terms of what the characters are saying. It thinks representationally, which is absolutely aligned with African-American politics all through the twentieth century. What is it that's going to be onscreen, whether it's a television or movie screen? What's going to be represented? Who's doing it? What's the narrative? In that seven-minute scene all of this is unpacked, even momentarily. It's a rare moment in American film.



### **Jeff Donaldson**

Columbia College called together some people that were considered experts in cultural affairs to position themselves, I would say, to receive the largesse from the federal government as well as from private philanthropy, to encourage artistic activity in the black community. This is traditionally done in this country following uprisings. There is a great deal of focus placed on cultural activity, like the Romans during the time they were conquering the whole of Europe. They had one hundred years of civil war at home so they started the Colosseum games to distract the people from what was really happening. This was the case in the Sixties.

### **Archive – *The Making of the President, 1968***

The rage of blacks bursts from the past. A century before, Abraham Lincoln foretold the future. “Now, when by all these means,” said Lincoln, “you have succeeded in dehumanizing the negro, when you have extinguished his soul and placed him in darkness like that which broods over the spirits of the damned, are you quite sure the demon which you have roused will not turn and rend you?” In the climate of the Sixties, the contagion of violence begins to sweep impatient ghettos. Though the Federal Government has strained with every effort for half a decade to cure injustice, the long-delayed and hasty effort cannot now quench a fury rooted in three centuries of want and hate. Our cities flame. Troops patrol their streets. Summer season in American becomes a time of trembling, a carnival of looting, burning, desolate. Such plumes of smoke become the signature on our greatest failure.

### **Fred MacDonald**

Television was the giant gorilla in the America cultural living by the late 1960s. It came on the scene and like a tidal wave rolls through every other communication form. Radio, newspapers, magazines all had to find new niches in which to flourish or perish, and most of them perished or were reduced in size and came together to serve an increasingly diminished audience. Television, on the other hand, is ubiquitous. Television is everywhere. By even the early 1960s almost ninety-eight per cent of American homes have a TV.

### **James Baughman**

Television was an enormously popular medium in the 1960s, and demand for it only grew over the course of the decade. The unpleasant irony is that when riots occurred in our largest cities, rioters routinely went into appliance stores. They didn’t attack city hall or police stations. They wanted television sets.

### **Archive – voiceover**

Seven hundred and fifty people have been arrested, most for looting. The casualty toll so far: three dead, three hundred and fifty injured. Over twenty fires of major proportions have been burning in Chicago and three persons have been killed by sniper fire. The trouble is in predominantly Negro sections, mostly areas of small businesses. One black section on the city's west side was a mass of flame and smoke this evening. By sundown all firemen were ordered to report immediately to the fire stations nearest to their home.

### **Bobby Seale**

You're talking about too many in the black community living in wretched living conditions. 1968 was also the year the Kerner Report was released, which explained how less than ten percent of the black community in the United States of America was above the poverty line. In other words we're talk about less than ten percent who were either educated or owned a business or owned a home.

### **Archive – voiceover**

Police said tonight that city firemen are being shot at. The disturbances began early in the day. Many students boycotted classes. Some schools closed early. Bands of youths roamed the streets and began smashing windows and looting stores. Six thousand National Guardsmen were deployed into the city. Half of them are now being deployed on the streets of Chicago. Mayor Richard Daley said, "I don't know what it is, but I hope to God it subsides." Jim Lovell, NBS News, Chicago.

### **Jeff Donaldson**

The government responded to the righteous indignation of the people, in the form of some one hundred and twenty-two insurrections in all the major cities in this country, by introducing all kinds of programmes designed to offset the inequities in the country, and to placate people. One of the major things that always comes out of these things is a great deal of artistic activity. So Columbia College, being a new institution in Chicago, relative to other art schools there, sought to seize upon this opportunity to expand what it had been doing in Chicago into the African-American community. They brought in people from all over the country to talk about their experiences in their areas and things that might be done in Chicago. They had not invited any one from the Chicago cultural community to participate in this conference, people who had, over the years, been active in the arts in the community.

### **Muhal Richard Abrams**

They did bring people in from out of the city to discuss the arts in Chicago, but they did not invite certain key people from among us.

**Robert Paige**

There was a bunch of us. We found out that there was a group of whites coming in, and they were going to tour cultural institutions in the Chicago area, but they were not coming to the South Side.

**Jeff Donaldson**

They wanted to put themselves in the position to receive all the kinds of funds coming in from federal and private sources that would address the lack of support for economic as well as social activities in the community.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

We called a meeting and we were discussing it, and decided that we would let it go by the first day, and on the second day we would go down and appear and just to become a part of it.

**Robert Paige**

We were sitting in this little coffee shop on 75th and Carter's Grove, and this elderly gentlemen heard us talking.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

We were talking about going the next day, after the initial opening. He stood up and said, "I thought you people were serious."

**Robert Paige**

"If you're serious about what you're talking about. You need to go down and picket."

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

He said, "You'll go when they open, when they start registering people. That's when you'll go." That turned the whole thing around, and we decided he was right. That's how it happened. The day it opened, when they were registering people at the table, we developed a name: Cobra.

**Jeff Donaldson**

We went there and crashed it

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

We turned out to be quite an important part of the conference because they realised it was an oversight they couldn't just brush off.

**Val Ward**

Haskell was at that conference, and I assume he was already going to do *Medium Cool*.

**Robert Paige**

So they took a break, and Abernathy and I went to the washroom. The door opened and Abernathy said, “There’s that motherfucker Haskell Wexler.” I’m the peacemaker, so I said, “Mr. Wexler, how are you. My name is Robert Paige.” We struck up a conversation. I lived in Hyde Park at the time, and he said, “I’d like come over.” So he came over to my studio at 49th and Woodline. There was a party that night, and then he told us about *Medium Cool*.

**Jeff Donaldson**

We got word that Haskell Wexler was going to do a film and he had seen the confrontation we’d had with the people from Columbia College and had wanted to do something that would show this kind of thing that was going on. He wanted us simply to say whatever we wanted to say about what was going on in the community.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

John Jackson and I represented the AACM, the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians. We were invited by Studs Terkel to come and discuss our group activities on his radio show. After we got through the interview we were talking off-mic, and Steve North walked in. Studs said, “Steven, you still need some people in that film?” Studs said they were doing a film and needed some fellows to play black militants. “What do you think?” We said, “We’ll go over and check it out.” So Steve North said, “I’ll take you over to see Haskell.” We went over to the neighbourhood where they were filming, and we talked to Haskell. He said, “You guys mind playing black militants?” We said, “OK, but we won’t read any scripts. We’ll improvise. It’s the only way we’ll consider being in the film.” He said, “OK.” We went into the building and found Jeff and everyone else up there. That’s how we found out they were there.

**Felton Perry**

I believe it was what they call “structured improvisation.” In other words, Haskell would say, “This is the feel of the situation, now you guys help me get it.” He would say what he wanted and then we would do what we could to improvise to deliver that.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

We wouldn’t have consented to be a part of it unless we improvised. I think most of us were very aware and cautious about anyone putting words in our mouth, especially during that time. We could state our own case.

**Paula Massood**

It took a great amount of trust on their part to trust that the end result would be something they would be satisfied with.

### **Paul Golding**

Their deal with us was, “We’ll let you use what you shot of us if we can see and approve it.” We had to cut that scene by itself, and it was the first real test. It was the first completed scene that we did. We shot it first because if there were problems we’d have to figure out what to do. We shot it first, I edited it, and they looked at it there in Chicago, and liked what they saw, so we got to keep it.

### **Val Ward**

Once we were selected to be in the film, I had a script, several people had a script, and in our conversation Haskell said, “I’m going to take your script away and I just want you to talk about whatever you feel.”

### *Medium Cool*

John Jackson                      Frank, I dug your name in the paper. What’s happening? You’re somewhat of a celebrity now, aren’t you? You want to fill me in?

Frank                                      Well you know, I’m not really a celebrity, but, yeah, I found the bread and I turned it in.

John Jackson                      You turned it in. Now were you acting as a Negro or were you acting as a black man? How do you feel? I’m concerned about this.

Frank                                      What do you mean, was I acting as a Negro or a black man?

John Jackson                      Because I feel that, if you were acting as a black man, you would have kept the money.

### **Muhal Richard Abrams**

He shouldn’t give that money back to white people. That’s what Jackson was talking about. You keep that money because of the way you’re treated. Because of racism, why would you give that money back?

### *Medium Cool* out-take

Frank                                      No, listen, man, the thing wasn’t done with that kind of thought in mind. First of all, there was a chance for the money to have been marked. I can’t come in there with ten thousand dollars and go out and buy a Cadillac and have everything going for me the next day because they’re going to walk up and say, “Hey, where’d you get the money?”

### **Val Ward**

In that room, you had a potpourri of black people representing different disciplines, but all speaking the same truths about who we are as a people.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

We were all very familiar with each other's work.

**Robert Paige**

The Sixties was prime time for Black culture in Chicago.

**Val Ward**

People were painters, dramatists and musicians, all together at this conference.

**Muhai Richard Abrams**

I was president of the AACM, the musician's organisation. We were in contact basically because we would attend each other's programmes. That was Chicago, the artistic community.

*Medium Cool* out-take

Frank

Well, I'll tell you what. I really was thinking like a black man, you know? That's according to my thinking, yeah. I believe that the black man in this country is helping to arouse the conscience and the morality of the country. And I believe that if in the event that I, as a black man, say, "Here, my circumstances aren't the greatest in the world but here's your money," you know? In addition to that, I get a little play on television, I get a little play in the newspapers, and I've got to end up with a better gig out of it.

John Jackson

Now, how does morality square with the system as we know it? Tell me.

Frank

How does morality square with the system?

John Jackson

Yeah. We live in a dishonest structure, don't we?

Frank

Listen, man. Ever since those people started out in Montgomery, Alabama, they had been grating the conscience and proving to the people of this country that black people can really get them back to the moral fibre...

*Medium Cool* out-take

Frank

Yeah, but if I go out there with some guns and with ten thousand dollars that I found, how long am I going to be alive?

### **Muhal Richard Abrams**

We didn't discuss it. We never discussed who we really were with Haskell. We never discussed it. He never asked. He just assumed, I imagine, that we were black militants. But there were no black militants in our group, at all. None. They were all artists.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Those guys like Jeff Donaldson, I didn't know them before and I didn't know them after, and he probably wouldn't want anything to do with me, anyway.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take**

[?]<sup>2</sup>

You had the chance to liberate some money, because we're at war, have been at war for four hundred years, liberate some money, and you turned it back to them to help them build their economic thing.

[?]<sup>1</sup>

Right, you're caught up in this thing.

Frank

There's one thing that you failed to overlook. Now, if in the event that the ten thousand dollars isn't claimed in a certain period of time, then I get the money, I get to keep it.

[?]<sup>2</sup>

If they want you to have it. Somebody ain't going to walk in there, they ain't gonna find somebody to claim that?

Frank

Well, man, you've got to believe in something, you know?

[?]<sup>3</sup>

You've got to believe in yourself first, you understand? Because you are first. You don't believe in yourself? The white man does. He believes in himself first. You put that ten thousand dollars back in your pocket. Put your picture in the paper like he said, you're on television. That's all you have.

### **Felton Perry**

We had a lot of attention from the people there in the neighbourhood because they wanted to know what the heck we were doing. That was also part of the thing going around. People wanted to know who were these people and what they were doing. Not only because there were white people but also, "I don't know you. What are you doing in my neighbourhood?"

### **Peter Bonerz**

In Chicago in 1968 there were ghettos, dangerous places for people to go. The black people couldn't go into the rich areas because they'd just be roused. The police would just pick them up. "What are you doing here?" If you didn't look like a cleaning woman or a garbage man, you were picked up. And if you were white and went into a black neighbourhood, you'd better have a reason for being there.

### **Haskell Wexler**

We went to a black neighbourhood and, particularly at that time, white people just do not walk in certain places in Chicago. And there was one scene where I had a radio mic on Peter Bonerz.

### *Medium Cool*

Man on street	What are you doing around here, man?
Peter	Just buying some cigarettes.
Man on street	You ain't got no right to come around here and buy no cigarettes, huh? Guys like you get shot all up, you know?
Peter	Yeah, let's go, guys.
Man on street	Now don't come back no more for no cigarettes, know what I mean?

### **Haskell Wexler**

I was thirty yards away with the camera. I didn't know what the hell they were saying.

### **Jeff Donaldson**

People participated because they really were sincerely committed to what they were doing and what they were talking about, which was the basis for our confrontation with the officials from Columbia College.

### **Felton Perry**

I was given the script, which I'd already seen when I first went in to do the audition, and they said, "You're up, Felton." Oh, man, the butterflies were going. I said, "Whoa, whoa." He said, "No, no, you should do what you did before, Felton," and he put the camera right in front of me and said "You should speak right to the camera."



## **Paul Golding**

That was a wonderful moment, because at the end, each of the characters in that scene had an opportunity to address the camera directly and to say whatever they wanted to say. We used the best stuff of that. It was great, it was very powerful. They had written some good stuff for themselves, and then Felton Perry got up and delivered the speech that Haskell had written. They didn't know him but they all kind of assumed that he was one of the brothers, and everybody slapped him on the back and said "Yeah, well-said." And it was well said. It was exactly right, as what they said. A nice combination of both the real and the scripted.

## ***Medium Cool* – Felton Perry**

You don't want to know, man. You don't know the people. You don't show the people, Jack. I mean, dig, here's some cat who's down and out, you dig? I mean, he's nobody, you know. So he says to his old man, "Man, I'm nobody. I mean, I'm going to die and nobody's going to know I lived." So the cat finds a brick and he throws it through Charlie's window, you understand? Or he takes a gun, and he shoots. Then the cat lives, man. He really lives, you dig? One hundred million people see the cat on the tube, man. And they say, "Ooh, the former invisible man lives!" Everybody knows where he went to school. They know about his wife and kids, everything. Because the tube is life, man. Life. You make him an Emmy, man. You make him the TV star of the hour, of the six, the ten, and the twelve-o'clock news. 'Cause what the cat is saying is truth, man. Why don't you find out what really is? Why do you always have to wait 'till somebody gets killed, man? Because somebody is going to get killed.

## **Haskell Wexler**

"'Cause what the cat is saying is truth." And then he goes on and says, "Why don't you find out what really is? Why do you always got to wait till somebody get killed, man, 'cause somebody's gonna get killed." What this is saying was sort of true in 1968, but if you look at the news today just think if you're just some poor slob who feels that nobody in the world knows they exist, that they're nobody. All he has to do is one violent thing, one, what you call "bad," thing, and do it bad enough and interestingly enough and theatrically enough, and hopefully, if there's a camera around, then he does live. He'll be on TV.

## ***Medium Cool* out-take**

Haskell Wexler (*off*)

[?]

Val Ward

[?]

Val Ward

So, things are gonna be going on there. Action.

Why don't we turn that TV set off? And deal with us.

Turn the TV set what?

Off. And deal with us.

Oh, I thought you said turn this TV set on. Very good, I agree with that. Jeff, what are you doing right now?

Jeff Donaldson I'm still painting, you know.  
Val Ward Doing your thing.  
Jeff Donaldson What I have to do. I have to paint. What are you doing?  
Val Ward Doing my thing, painting my own picture my own way,  
you know.  
Jeff Donaldson That verbal thing, that's cool.  
Val Ward Yeah, that verbal thing. Trying to get the message of  
black writers to black people, for awareness sake.  
Jeff Donaldson Maybe that's why we're all here today. We're trying to  
bring a message.  
[?] I think we should turn the TV set of if we want to deal  
with us.  
Val Ward Oh, block it out, baby. You know, those things that  
you can't hear, you block it out if you really dig us and  
what we're about.  
[?] Yeah, what about us?  
[?] What's that around your neck, my man?  
Jeff Donaldson You know, this was defined by a sister on 35<sup>th</sup> street. She  
called it a charm. And I think that's very cool because  
that's what it's all about, it's a charm. And that word has  
many ramifications. You can take it off into many things.  
You still printing, Barbara?  
Barbara Hogu Yes, I'm still printing. I'm doing silkscreens right now.  
Jeff Donaldson You know what I like? That thing you did of the thin  
female form, you remember? With the flag with the  
jagged edge?  
Barbara Hogu Yeah, yellow thing. I'm doing a racism series.  
Jeff Donaldson That sounds timely, don't you think?

**Jeff Donaldson**

It occurred over a two-day period, but we were there maybe five hours max. I mean, they set up the cameras and everything, and we went in and did these little things, and that was it.

***Medium Cool* out-take**

Jeff Donaldson Barbara, I saw your show at the Afro-Arts. It really gassed me.  
Barbara Hogu What did you like?

Jeff Donaldson                      She's got a piece there of this gaunt female form, you dig? Who is part skeleton and part flesh. And she has this long neck that floats right into the shoulders, you dig? And behind all this, is this flag. Turbulent, tormented, torn down.

[?]                                      What'd you make it out of?

Barbara Hogu                        It's a woodcut.

[?]                                      How long did it take to make?

Barbara Hogu                        Oh, about two days.

[?]                                      You ran from ceramics to wood. Were you into wood before?

Barbara Hogu                        Oh, I was in wood before. Ceramics is just a hobby.

[?]                                      It's a nice thing, ceramics.

**Peter Bonerz**

The scene where Bob and I go to the black neighbourhood to talk to the guy about having returned the money in the taxi cab, that was a fearful situation. You can see it on our faces. Bob and I – more my character than Bob's – I don't think I was acting. The idea of us going into this apartment and facing these young, black, powerful, and politically active angry men was nervous-making.

**Leonard Weinglass**

You never see that interaction captured as accurately and vividly as it's done in *Medium Cool*.

**Robert Paige**

In the scene it was real difficult because it was a small apartment. They were trying to set up some dollies to run these big cameras, but they couldn't manoeuvre through it, so the cat had to hold this big sucker on his shoulder and he was pissed because it was heavy. But they got the scene. Basically we were supposed to be a bunch of militants in this apartment, and somebody was knocking at the door.

*Medium Cool*

Jeff                                      We have a visitor.

*Medium Cool* out-take

John                                    Hi. Frank Baker here?

Jeff Donaldson                      Frank Baker here?

John                                    Is this where Frank Baker lives?

Jeff Donaldson                      You a fellow cab driver?

John                                    Am I a fellow cab driver?

Jeff Donaldson                      Yeah.

John No. No, I'm a friend of Frank's, though.  
 Jeff Donaldson A friend of Frank's.  
 John Right.  
 Jeff Donaldson I'm a friend of Frank's.  
 John Hey, we're all friends of Frank's.  
 Jeff Donaldson Everybody's Frank's friend.  
 John Everybody's Frank's buddy, you got ten thousand dollars.  
 Look, you don't have to put me on. Is Frank here?  
 Jeff Donaldson Is Frank here?  
 John Yeah. Frank Baker.  
 Jeff Donaldson Frank Baker?  
 John There isn't any Frank Baker here? I think I got the right address. I don't see a number, but I think this is his house. Is it?

***Medium Cool* out-take**

John Frank Baker live here?  
 Jeff Donaldson Frank Baker live here?  
 John Frank Baker, cab driver?  
 Jeff Donaldson Frank Baker, cab driver.  
 John Yeah, same guy. Does he live here?  
 Jeff Donaldson Frank Baker live here?  
 John Hey, look. You don't have to put me on. Is he here or not?  
 Jeff Donaldson Not, or here?  
 John Yeah, is Frank Baker? I did a story on him. I'm a news...  
 Jeff Donaldson Is Frank Baker I did a story on him I'm a news...  
 John Photographer.  
 Jeff Donaldson Photographer.  
 John Right.

***Medium Cool* out-take**

Jeff Donaldson You know, Chicago cops are getting funnier looking every day.

**Francis Ward**

During the 1960s it was very much apparent that African-Americans had a major distrust of all white institutions. White media, white business establishments, government institutions, labour unions. Any institutions that were part of the traditional fabric of life at the time that were owned and/or controlled by white people, African-Americans tended to distrust those institutions because African-Americans felt at the time that the institutions were inherently racist.

### **Paula Massood**

Here we have a moment where the subjects are literally turning toward the camera and saying, “Wait a second. We have something to say about this, and we’re going to question you in terms of what you’re going to put on screen and what story you’re telling.”

### ***Medium Cool* – [unidentified]**

When you come in here, and you say that you’ve come to do something of human interest, it makes a person wonder whether you’re going to do something of interest to other humans or whether you consider the person human in whom you’re interested. And you have to understand that, too. You can’t just walk in out of your arrogance and expect things to be like they are, because when you walk in yourselves straight to city hall and all the mass communications media. And you are the exploiters, you’re the ones who distort and ridicule and emasculate us, and that ain’t cool.

### **Francis Ward**

For African-Americans to be suspicious of white reporters was something very typical that occurred in the 1960s. In the scene in *Medium Cool* in 1968, that kind of suspicion and sometimes open hostility is exhibited as part of the context in which white reporters had to operate. Also, you should understand that, during that time, major white news organisations employed almost no black people. Before the Kerner Commission Report of 1968, you could count the number of blacks who worked for mainstream white media almost on one hand. There were only a few organisations – the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* among them – that employed only a small number of black reporters, editors, or photographers, and, except for Mal Goode, who worked for ABC news, I think beginning in 1962, television news had none.

### **Peter Bonerz**

These guys were intimidating us. And they weren’t actors intimidating other actors. I had done that. As an improviser, you know, I’m usually out there with fellow improvisers. And nobody threatens anybody, really. It’s acting. This wasn’t acting. I mean, I felt really intimidated. Just because Haskell was there with a camera didn’t mean that I wasn’t going to get hurt.

### **Francis Ward**

I could sort of understand that, given the tenor of the times in 1968, that there was not a great deal of communication between white and black, and what communication there was often times often times was more based upon suspicion and open antagonism than based upon any real attempt to communicate and find some common ground.

**Medium Cool out-take**

Jeff Donaldson

You know, Chicago cops are getting funnier looking every day.

**Medium Cool**

Gus

I'm not a cop. I'm a soundman.

**Paula Massood**

That's a beautiful moment because it's saying, "Well, you might feel as though you're open minded and you're coming in trying to do the best. You have the best intentions. But you're still speaking for us, and we don't want that. We're going to make you answerable for it in a way that you've never been answerable before." It's saying, "Look, you need to be responsible for what you're doing."

**Medium Cool out-take**

Jeff Donaldson

I bet you've got credentials, too. The FBI supplies the best credentials. We know you know that one of the best ways to spy on black people is to impersonate TV cameramen.

Gus

See, I'm up here with John. We're talking to Frank about a story.

Haskell Wexler (*off*)

Start that line again.

Gus

See, I'm up here with John. We're talking to Frank about a story.

Jeff Donaldson

What's that?

Gus

That's my page boy.

Jeff Donaldson

Your page boy? Hey, Richard? Come and dig this cat's page boy. And what do you do with, "my page boy?"

Gus

Well, I don't do anything with it. It just hangs there. The station, if they want me to go someplace and do something, they call me up on it.

Jeff Donaldson

Oh, you mean they give you orders on this?

Gus

Yeah.

Richard Abrams

Man, you mean to tell me that people can call you and you can't talk back to them?

Gus

Yeah.

Richard Abrams

You dig that?

Jeff Donaldson

Yeah, you mean you're a receiver and not a sender.

Gus

Yeah. Now, come on. Let me have it, huh?

**Peter Bonerz**

To this day, when I look at the film and I decide to leave and go wait in the car, I don't know if I'm acting or just scared shitless.

**Val Ward**

That was natural. It was natural for me, it was natural for Jeff. Never did we think we were threatening anybody, or making them feel up against the wall.

**Muhal Richard Abrams**

There was no hostility there. They weren't in any danger, of course, from us. In other words, when you see a good actor, that actor lived a part that impressed you. He lived that part. He was that person. So that's what happened to us in that instance. We have to live that part. We had to live that part, and that's what it was. When we did it, it was like real and serious. It was real and serious. We were acting but it was real and serious, if you can understand that. We became the character.

**Francis Ward**

In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson appointed a citizen's commission to investigate the causes of the riots that were plaguing America during the 1960s, and which were especially damaging in the year 1967 in Detroit, Newark, New Jersey, and other American cities. It was called the National Advisory Commission on civil disorders, but it has become known as the Kerner Commission, because Otto Kerner was the chair of the commission. It spent months investigating the causes of the riots that had taken place in American cities during the 1960s, beginning in the early 1960s. It also investigated the Watts riot of 1965 in Detroit. There was a riot in Chicago in the summer of 1966, the huge Detroit riot in 1967, the riot in Newark, New Jersey, and in countless other American cities. The Kerner Commission issued a very damaging report in 1968 placing the blame for the riot squarely on issues related to endemic structural racism, lack of opportunity, lack of jobs, lack of housing, discrimination in employment, and other issues related to that.

The Kerner Commission also pointed a finger of blame at the news media. It said that the mainstream news media had not spent enough time either reporting on the causes of the problems facing African-Americans at the time, nor had the major news media hired and employed enough African-Americans either as reporters, as photographers, as editors, or in any other capacity. In this regard, during the time of the riots, in 1964, 65, 66, and 67, and even in 1968, the riots that occurred after Dr. King was assassinated, the major newspapers and TV stations found themselves in a dilemma. They wanted to cover the riot, but they didn't have any black reporters, and the whites who worked for those newspapers, most of them didn't want to go to the riot areas because they were too afraid. So what happened is that, in many cases, the newspapers had to go and find some black who worked for that paper in some

capacity, and send this individual out even though this person may have been an untrained reporter simply to make observations about what this person saw. In 1968, the major news organisations, even though most of them didn't necessarily accept all of the conclusions of the Kerner Commission Report, did know and understand that one of their great failings was the failure to hire blacks. At that point, beginning in late 68 or early 1969, the mainstream organisations did begin to hire a modest number of African-Americans as reporters, sometimes as photographers.

### **Robert Forster**

I do remember that the moment at which I was supposed to exit the apartment, suddenly, Haskell sent two or three people into the frame, cut off my escape, and started grilling me and pushing me and telling me that I'm supposed to do this and I'm supposed to listen to them and I'd better shoot footage because they're being unfairly treated. I spit out a line that I always thought was pertinent.

### *Medium Cool*

[?]

John

I just saved your life. You understand that, don't you?  
If I gotta be afraid in order for your argument to work,  
then you've got no argument.

### **Robert Forster**

Because argument is only good if it holds truth, and since it seemed to me that I was getting a one-sided battering, I just wanted to say that on the exit. That was improvised.

### **Val Ward**

At that door, the little time I had, I had to say, "Here I am and take me for who I am and what I have to say."

### **John Schultz**

The reporter's out there thinking he's going to do a story that's sympathetic for these people and, lo and behold, they're going to tell him, "No, you just don't have it right. And we're going to tell you what it's about." And do so in a very clear, vivid, articulate fashion.

### **Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970**

Interviewer

You had one of them say words to the effect, "You, the cameraman, come in here, and you expect to encapsulate in a fifteen minute film three hundred years of sorrow." Isn't that basically what they think of you?



Haskell Wexler

Yes, exactly. In fact the very things that were said in those lines were things and feelings they had about me personally. There was a great deal of hostility and uncomfortable feeling in that room.

Interviewer

You are professionally exploiting them?

Haskell Wexler

Yeah, I guess you could say that. But also very fearful, because I felt that what they were saying was honest and from what they believed, though I wrote it from my experience with them. I could only give them lines which they themselves deeply believed and felt. In fact, when they said it, my own words frightened me.

**Val Ward**

I didn't know what I was going to say when he opened the door. I thought that we had been left out of films, we had been distorted, and I want to tell him that I am an actress and I want to talk like an African-American and not how people write the stereotypes.

*Medium Cool* out-take

Val Ward

You want to do something? You see, we buy these products and things, too, and you people have got your images of what we look like.

John

Folks, I have gotta leave. I don't have time for this.

[?]

Folks, nothing. We are black people.

Val Ward

No, you wanted an interview a while ago. You wanted something real, you want to go back and give your station something? Ok, so we'll give it to you.

John

All right, then talk to me. Then tell me what you want. Tell me what you want.

Val Ward

I would like to get on your TV station...

John

Go on, get on with it.

Val Ward

And do my thing. What is my thing?

John

What is your thing?

Val Ward

My thing is being black people. Not the way you see black people. Hip to that? Doing the works of black writers.

*Medium Cool* out-take

John

I'm talking to you kids.

[?]

Kids.

Val Ward

No, you ain't calling me a kid. I'm not a kid. I'm a black actress, and you refer to me as Mrs. Warrett.

John

Mrs. Warrett, all right, I gotta leave, Mrs. Warrett. Do you know what politeness is? I'm trying to be polite.

Val Ward Politeness is what I define as politeness. It's what I demand from you.

John Honey, dear, I've got to leave.  
[?] I've told you about that "dear," and that "honey" and all those other changes. We are black folks. You give us respect as human beings.

John All right, folks.

Val Ward You mean Mrs. Warrett. Excuse me, please.

John Excuse me, please, Mrs. Warrett. If you don't mind.

Val Ward Yeah, that's why you people will never get anyplace. Because you ain't ready to dig what's happening, baby.

John Well, maybe you're not ready to dig what's happening baby, either.

**Val Ward**

You want the life of the black community and our history, and you can't get that in one minute. You have to know us, you have to know the people, you have to know the history of America. Because the history has been left out, it's been distorted. It's been told from the perspective of the slave master instead of the slaves.

**Medium Cool**

[?] You came down here to do some sort of jive interview. You did that. Came down here with fifteen minutes of a black sensibility. And so you don't understand that. You came down here to shoot fifteen minutes of what has taken three hundred years to develop. Grief, you know?

John Look, I'm not interested in grief.  
[?] And all we're trying to explain to you is that you don't understand.

John I do something. You see, I do it well. That's my job.  
[?] No, but you don't do it black enough. You can't, because you're not black.

**Val Ward**

We were not doing anything to threaten anybody. We were just kind of acting, but acting real because this was a real situation.

**Medium Cool out-take**

[?] So what'd you say about Frank?

Jeff Donaldson No. What next?

Haskell Wexler (*off*) Ok, keep going a little more. Now, don't lean back this time.

Jeff Donaldson                      Ok.  
[?]                                      Well, I think that...  
Jeff Donaldson                      But he's still a beautiful cat. He's still a brother. What  
   he needs from us is not criticism, but bolstering. You  
   dig? I mean the cat needs to know that he's still a  
   member of the family.  
[?]                                      Hey, you hear something back there?  
Jeff Donaldson                      Oh, no!

**Haskell Wexler:**

The woman who stopped them on the way out was strictly them. Absolutely, strictly them. Peter Bonerz's idea of leaving under this tense situation was strictly Peter. I was seeing a movie in front of my very eyes, really. I think it was just a lucky set of circumstances. Luck in the fact that the elements that were in there, I couldn't have dreamed of being said better.

**Muhal Richard Abrams**

There were many people left out. He didn't get the poets. If he'd had the poets there!

**Val Ward**

I think that Jeff and Richard and the rest of us would like to have had more time, to have said more, the script to have been bigger. But the little amount of time that we had represents true African-American feelings and voices, because people were honest to themselves. That's the only way we would have participated in that film, to have had the freedom to say what was on our minds.

**Muhal Richard Abrams**

We were very insistent that there would not be any misrepresentation because we were there representing a lot of people who couldn't be there. Our image would reflect on them. We were very aware of that. Very aware.

**Paula Massood**

What happens after *Medium Cool* is that we start seeing a rise in African-American filmmaking through Blacksploitation film, starting with Melvin Van Peebles, and then we have a very short-lived moment of Blacksploitation filmmaking until about 1975/6, before it starts falling away. For the most part those are very formulaic, and they follow action film conventions, mixed with other conventions. Those films purported to provide some sort of overview of African-American politics. However, very few of them were as nuanced as what we see happening in *Medium Cool*. When there are militants in Blacksploitation films they're called "militants" and they're coded in particular ways. They wear berets and they are absolutely depoliticised at the same time that it appears that they are politicised.

*Medium Cool* out-take

Jeff Donaldson

Val Ward

Val, you still doing your thing?

Doing my thing, what must [?] be doing but doing their thing? Like, getting the message to black people, you know? What we're about, pride, identity, that sort of thing. Taking care of business.

Jeff Donaldson

It's really nice how we can all get together here, although the circumstances aren't exactly what we dig them to be. But it's nice.

Val Ward

It's always beautiful, Jeff, when we're together, because the one thing we've got is love, 'cause the world is cut off from that. That's one of the things we share, being together. Talking about our thing we're doing out there.

Jeff Donaldson

Felton Perry

Jeff Donaldson

Felton Perry

Felton, are you still on that Second City scene?

Not right now.

Well, it was kind of a drag, anyway.

Well, I learned some things, you know? I learned technique. How to do what I want to do on stage, you know? Many approaches.

**Paula Massood**

Even the way in which the politically aware characters speak to each other, there's no dialect, there's no slang, there's no vernacular. So Wexler is pulling away from a lot of assumptions about the use of vernacular, whether it's an urban dialect. The clothing is quite different. It's not the gun, it's not the leather jacket or the beret. It's people wearing their regular, everyday stuff. It's an interesting choice all around because it makes viewers question what they see.



Haskell Wexler  
Interviewer  
Haskell Wexler  
Interviewer  
Haskell Wexler

Well, that aspect was in my script.  
You predicted it.  
I expected it. I didn't expect it exactly that way, but I expected there would be trouble in the streets. It's not as prophetic as it may sound, because at that time there was a strong feeling against the war in Vietnam. If that feeling wasn't channelled into more traditional American political patterns, it was bound to erupt in the streets, and there was no place for those people to express their anti-war feelings but in the streets.  
Were you glad it happened for the purposes of your movie?  
That's a good question. I don't think I allowed myself the relief to feel that I was pleased that it happened. It's a good question. I'm not sure, but I think if I find the answer to that question I'll find out many things about my own person, so to that extent it's a good question that I can't give an honest answer to.

### **Jonathan Haze**

I often think, "What would we have done had we had a big budget? What would we have done if we'd had big stars?" It never would have happened. Not only would it never have happened, it wouldn't have been as immediate. It wouldn't have been as spontaneous. It would have been another hack movie. We were under the pressure. Things were only happening once and if we got it then we got it, and if we didn't then too bad. We couldn't set it up again, the cops weren't going to do what we told them, the National Guard wasn't going to do what we told them.

We can the whole unit out of the Sherman Hotel in downtown Chicago, which was owned by Haskell's brother. All the garages under the hotel were full of our trucks and equipment, and we had all our crew staying in the hotel. It was all a very contained unit. We were editing in the hotel as we went. Paul Golding, our editor, had a room set up. We'd bring the film in and have it printed, and it would go to him and he'd put sequences together.

### **Andy Davis**

Haskell had this very fluid small film crew that by today's standards was a documentary crew. They didn't have big ten-ton trucks and all kind of lights and generators. It wasn't that kind of situation. His whole technique was putting actors in real situations and using that backdrop without having an assistant director stage people. We spent a lot of time just trying to be part of the fabric of what the kids in the streets were doing. Haskell looked like he fit right in with everybody. His camera was an inch wider because it was 35mm rather than 16mm, and he was forcing himself to use his documentary roots to create this movie.

**Peter Kuttner**

The thing that made *cinéma-vérité* “*vérité*” was the ability to break the sound and picture apart.

**Mike Gray**

The networks at that time had cameras on braces. It was really a studio camera they were wearing on a platform. They were also recording the sound optically, on the film itself, which meant the camera had to be plugged in with a sound cable that went to a mixer, a guy carrying a box and wearing earphones. He was riding the sound levels, and he was connected to a boom man. So you had three people. In a mob scene, or if the cops were chasing you, which they happened to do pretty much that whole year of 1968, you were just trapped.

**Peter Kuttner**

The magic happened when someone figured out a way to keep the camera and sound running at sixty cycles a second to keep them in sync.

**Mike Gray**

The official press could not capture what was going on. They had to shoot from a rooftop or something like that.

**Peter Kuttner**

It made your filmmaking much more mobile. You could run across the room. Your soundman could stand on one side of the room and the camera could move back and forth.

**Haskell Wexler**

Filming in the riots was like any other filming I'd ever done. I had my camera, I had my actors. I was oblivious to the actual physical intensity that was existing there. I knew it was a good scene. I was watching a good movie, until I got tear-gassed.

**Chris Newman**

The documentary experience was for me the perfect training. Making good documentary sound has nothing to do with technique. It has only to do with what the story is about. I was simply putting my mind into the head of the cameraman and/or the filmmaker. Sometimes I could see Haskell, sometimes I couldn't see him. When I couldn't see him, I would shoot what I thought was relevant to the material.

**Ron Vargas**

We tried to stay together. We started out having two cameras, Haskell's camera and Michael's camera, and it started getting active, they started to confront each other, and that's when I grabbed a third camera.

### **Michael Margulies**

We were never more than ten or fifteen feet apart. We were usually filming the same action. Every once in a while I would see something different and Haskell would see something different and we would go over and shoot it.

### **Ron Vargas**

There was so much going on you could not contain it all with one or two cameras. In fact, there is a lot we missed even with three cameras. It was going on in all directions. Between Michael, Haskell and myself we were all photographing different aspects of the riots and it all seemed to cut together. There were people getting hurt who pulled back that we wanted to photograph, we had to get the human interest in it, we had to see the people who were hit and we had to go with it.

### **Studs Terkel**

We're in the crowd, it's a scene out of a tapestry, a medieval tapestry you see. The Northside Ministry is the group sponsoring this protest in Lincoln Park and they carry a huge wooden cross and they plant it in the dirt where they have the gathering. And the kids are all dressed, gypsy-like and ragamuffin, tattered and everything else, colourful. These are like Christians, raggedy, singing the old songs. And there in the distance is the Roman legion, plexi-glass over their faces. And you hear a voice over the bullhorn saying, "You have fifteen minutes to depart, otherwise we will have to take further action." But nobody left! They stayed, and here it came. Here came the teargas. Wham! Wham! And we're retreating and coughing, and just then a teargas canister falls at our feet. Now remember, we're fifty-something. And a kid, long blonde hair, must have been seventeen, eighteen years old see the canister and he kicks it towards himself, away from us. And he says, "Now you two old guys, get out of here." I said, "Old! How dare you!" But that moment to me is what it was all about: that kid kicked the canister towards himself, away from us. That is what it's all about. These kids wanted a decent world.

### **Jonathan Haze**

Haskell had been to Chicago and was having problems getting things organised the way he wanted it. People didn't understand what it was he wanted to do or how he wanted to approach it, so he came to me. We had been working together at Dove Films, a commercial company, and had shot on the street a lot and around regular people. He asked me if I could go to Chicago and work with him, but the only job he had for me was a non-union job as location manager. Everything else was union. I took the job for little money and went to Chicago to ramrod the operation. I knew people in the peace movement and street types, and knew all the hippies and Yippies and goofies and everyone else, so I would go out with my friends and hand out and find out exactly what was going down the next day. Then I'd get it organised for Haskell to have a group come in there and shoot it.



**Steven North**

He would go to where the young people were partying every night and where there was a great deal of music, a great deal of dope smoking, and Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman were all there and they know exactly what was going to happen the next day and where people were going to show up. There was a pretty good chance that if these people showed up, the police would be there and the police would break ranks and crunch a few heads. Jonathan actually had word the night before and we would actually re-jig the schedule.

**Jonathan Haze**

We filming in Grant Park. On one side of the park were all these rioters and protesters and the cops and National Guard. Across the street were kids playing ball and ladies pushing babies carriages. It just seemed like it was a juxtaposition of the whole thing. You couldn't understand what was going on because here it looked like a war zone and over there it looked like a peace zone, and it was all right close by. It was in spots, and that's how we got ahead of the game, knowing where those spots would be.

**Steven North**

Having heard that there was something going to take place we would be there the next day. But just as often we would show up and very little was happening, and Verna would be going through a very peaceful situation, and it was just like a nice day in the park.

## The Woman in the Yellow Dress

### Haskell Wexler

I said “Verna, you’re there looking for your son. Try to get out.” The National Guard had encircled certain areas of the park, so she went through and experienced it in character. I would send her into certain areas which I thought would help tell the story.

### Verna Bloom

Once I convinced him that I had to be there all the time, then they would just tell me generally where to go, where to walk, and that’s all. Whatever my reactions were to whatever it was I saw, I was directed to act in any particular way. Once I did start to shoot in the riots and Haskell saw that it really was a potential danger, he didn’t want to expose me to that, but I said that it just wouldn’t work without me, and that I had to be there. So I insisted on staying in that. I was never really perceived by the police as an individual as being dangerous. In fact, when we tried to instigate something, there’s a point when I go up to one of the policemen and tell him that I’ve lost my child and ask him for help. I think they had been hoping that there would have been some kind of altercation, but the cop was very nice to me and he let me go in where I was asking to go. I didn’t have that look about me in terms of the stereotypical troublemaker.

### Steven North

There was a sea of people, whether it was in the park, on the streets, wherever it was, you had a woman in a yellow dress, and there was no way to loose her.

### Verna Bloom

So many people have asked me about the yellow dress, and that was totally serendipitous. I didn’t even cross my mind that I would be easy to spot in a yellow dress. I never thought about it. I was looking for the kinds of things that a woman from Kentucky would have bought as a sort of a dress-up dress, a nice dress, something nice than the thrift shop things. The fact that it was bright yellow and made it so easy to follow me around in the riots was a godsend. Everybody thought that the yellow dress was this big calculation. No: happy accident, that’s all.

### Haskell Wexler

I was not terrified during the riots. I’ve filmed in riots in Guatemala, I filmed riots in Brazil, I was wounded in World War II. I’ve been around that kind of violence. I feel very indestructible, particularly when I’m behind the camera.

### **Ron Vargas**

I had too much going to realise really what danger I was in. I didn't have time to panic. When I thought about it afterwards I said, "Wow! Lucky to get out of there." But at the time, no.

### **David Dellinger**

We gathered in Lincoln Park and decided ahead of time to observe the closing hour, and when I was walking out of the park somebody pulled my arm on the right-hand side and I looked to him. He was someone in Mayor Daley's office and he said, "When you go out to the park, turn to the left and stay as close as possible to the gate because the police will charge from the right." That is exactly what happened, and when they charged, they said, "Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill! Kill!"

### **Archive – [unidentified]**

The policemen came over in bunches, howling and yelling with their sticks out, rushing and beating the people. This plainclothes policeman, a very big man who weighed about three hundred pounds, came up and grabbed this white fellow and started choking him. He kind of scared me, so I ran up to grab his hand to take it away from the boy. He turned around and grabbed my hair and threw me to the ground and started pulling me. A young woman by the name of Jane Meyerton, he grabbed us both by the hair and started pulling us, and he threw her down. He called in a policeman with handcuffs and told him to handcuff us, take us to jail and charge us with something. He put the handcuffs on us and started dragging us through the grass. We didn't resist arrest at all. After he pushed us into the car, he turned around to tell me that he knew how to treat my kind. I'm wild and from the jungle. He turned around and hit me with his stick a couple of times.

### **Dick Gregory**

A police riot. That's a word that had never been coined in the history of police in the world. A police riot. I think the youngsters were shocked. They didn't know that in their America, you could be clubbed, beat up and tear-gassed for exercising a constitutional right.

### **Edward Burke**

In 1968 we had two-way radios in our cars, but once you were away from your car, once you were out of your car, you had no communications. So you had platoon or squad-size groups of police officers, with a sergeant or perhaps a lieutenant in charge, who were being subjected to rumours of violence, with no way to confirm it. You had police officers in big patrol wagons in this stifling heat, with their riot gear on, being cooped up and not being able to get a cold drink or a sandwich. Yes, their tempers got short, and when they were released to take action against a group of protestors or a mob, they may have overreacted. But was it a police riot? I don't think so.

**Leonard Weinglass**

The police experts had testified that they never raised their clubs, that they never struck anyone, that they were never abusive or that the use of force was ever excessive. Clearly when you look at the film footage that's in *Medium Cool* you will see all of that clearly demonstrated.

**David Farber**

From the beginning, they had, as the saying would eventually become, zero tolerance. Their sense was that if they gave an inch, these protests would take a mile and then all hell would break loose. These are cops used to riding roughshod, one, two people at a time, over dissidents, over petty crime, over derelicts on the street. They're not used to dealing with upper middle class white suburban protestors. They don't have the tools or the tactics, and they've been specifically told by their bosses, "Brook no interference. Take no prisoners. Don't take them down to jail, they'll just get out. Crack a head and they'll go home."

**Quentin Young**

We actually had records on over a thousand people hurt, including six policemen who we did treat who got hurt along the way. In our report, which we summarised and gave to the press, we noted that most of the wounded we tended were from behind. Head injuries, back injuries, all suggesting that people were fleeing or at least trying to avoid the injury.

**Bill Frapolly**

They did give people a way to leave the park. They didn't surround it. If you wanted to leave you could leave, if you wanted to fight you could fight, if you wanted to stand around and look stupid... Some people got hit when they didn't move fast enough.

**Paul Levinson**

By the 1950s, the National Convention becomes very important. It becomes a staged political event that's supposed to galvanise the country and get voters to be enthusiastic about the candidates who are nominated. As such, it's supposed to be a profoundly democratic event because it's supposed to show the people that their representatives are choosing who the next President will be. One of the great ironic travesties of the Convention in Chicago 1968 is that the televised coverage showed precisely the opposite.

### **Archive – Mayor Richard Daley**

It's unfortunate that the television industry didn't have the information I had two weeks ago, those reports of intelligence on my desk that certain people planned to assassinate the three contenders for the presidency, that several people planned to assassinate many of the leaders, including myself. All of this talk of assassination and it happening in our city, I didn't want what happened in Dallas or what happened in California to happen in Chicago, so I took the necessary precautions. No mayor wants to call the National Guard. In the interest of the preservation of law and order for our people – and I don't mean law and order in the brutal way, I mean law and order with justice – I called out the National Guard. After reviewing all these reports and after reviewing and conferring with the Secret Service and intelligence of the cities that were affected, I thought in the interest of the protection of the candidates, and as well as in the interests of the protection of our leaders, that this was the proper thing to do.

### **General Richard Dunn**

It was my belief, and it's still my belief, that the leaders of those people who were on the street and were causing trouble would do whatever was required to provoke a reaction from the law-enforcement officials, including the police department that they ultimately provoked.

### **Quentin Young**

The Mayor issued a press statement called "The Strategy of Confusion" and our press statement was entitled "The Strategy of Contusion." Sorry about that.

### **General Richard Dunn**

The National Guard was trained to handle demonstrations and crowds and disturbances. The police, historically, had been trained to deal kind of one-on-one. They hadn't had a hell of a lot of training in crowd control or disturbance control, and I think that's why they came out if with a bad reputation.

### **Eugene McCarthy**

It was just inexcusable stuff, but frightening. Someone sent me an album of the Convention. On one side they had pictures from Prague and on the other side they had pictures of Chicago, and there were essentially the same things happening.

### **Reuven Frank**

One of the things that struck me so much was the similarity between the statement of the Commander of the Soviet troops entering Prague and the Governor of Illinois when he called out the National Guard, talking about public order and all those clichés of the establishment.

### **General John Phipps**

One very ingenious thing which our own maintenance crew developed was taking a jeep and put a barbed wire guard above the jeep, sticking out in front. Then you line up those jeeps, side by side, six inches apart, and if you move down the street, nobody's going to stand in front of you. If they did they'd be rammed with the barbed wire.

### **Michael Margulies**

The first moment of fear I felt was when I noticed the jeep with mounted fifty calibre machine guns rolling in, one after another. On the machine guns were their ammunition belts, fifty calibre bullets. They were loaded. I imagine the only thing that was one was the safety.

### **General Richard Dunn**

The orders were that weapons were not to be loaded, that ammunition was not to be issued to the individual soldiers but was to be retained under company control and not distributed unless some situation got entirely out of hand. In the extreme they might be required to use it. To my knowledge, those orders were obeyed and no ammunition was ever issued.

### **CBS news report (1978)**

#### **Chris Newman**

I was with Haskell for almost all of the shooting. For me it was the most dangerous time of my entire life. It was more dangerous than Vietnam. In Vietnam it was totally clear to me where the shots were going to come from, where the danger was. It was those "other guys." In Chicago, the police would do all kinds of things like say to the crowd, "Get out of the street, go up on the grass." And then, when everybody was safe up on the grass, the police would charge in and beat the shit out of the kids. There was a moment when Haskell and I were shooting, and we had kind of improvised armbands that said "News" or "Press" or something. A young cop came and went to hit us with a nightstick. I've never been so frightened in my entire life because the guy spoke English, he was an American, and there was no question. And an older cop intervened and said "What are you crazy? Don't hit those guys, they're press." And when it was finished, I turned to Haskell and said "Listen, I no longer believe that nothing can happen to me" – which is how I always felt when I was in warzones – and Haskell said "Yeah, let's go get a drink." And we went a got a drink and we never went back.

## The Whole World is Watching

### **Neil Hickey**

Early in the life of TV news they used to call it “the thousand pound pencil.” The camera and all the equipment that went with it. Whereas a pad and pencil didn’t seem to be too intrusive, suddenly this other animal called television news came along. In the Sixties, TV newsmen began to understand that the action of the camera became part of the story.

### **Reuven Frank**

The entire country knew that the activists, the war protestors, would come to Chicago because the networks were coming to Chicago to cover the Convention. They were coming to where the cameras were. You put a camera in the middle of the desert and in about fifteen minutes you’ve got a hundred people.

### **Paul Levinson**

The protection that the press enjoys under the First Amendment, as trampled upon as it is, as cavalier as people in authority are about abrogating the First Amendment rights of the press, such as it is, only exists because the press is “cool.” It’s detached from the demonstration, it’s not part of the demonstration. The instant the press becomes part of the demonstration, then they become fair game for the clubs.

### **Ron Vargas**

The Chicago police were trying to break our magazines. They didn’t want to be photographed showing what they were doing. They knew if they popped that magazine, the film would be exposed and wouldn’t be any good.

### **Tom Hayden**

This was a time when the media itself was shocked by the police behaviour and the behaviour of the political officials. They just didn’t expect what they were seeing and what they were getting.

### **Mike Gray**

We’re unloading our cameras, and three cops come around the corner of the Art Institute. They’re looking at us and tapping their batons. They’re all in riot gear. One of them says, “Where the fuck do you guys think you’re going?”

### **Fred MacDonald**

The victims of the police riot and repression were the protesters, but anyone that’s communicating the protest, anybody that has a camera, was fair game. There are instances of cameramen bloodied from the whacks on the head from billy clubs because they were filming it.

**Dan Hallin**

This was shocking to journalists. This was something they imagined happening in Czechoslovakia with the Soviet invasion, but they didn't imagine it happening in America.

**Don Rose**

The press was clearly targeted by the police because the police themselves understood that they were doing wrong and they were being caught in the act of doing wrong. All the brutality that used to take place behind closed doors in precinct offices in stretches of the south side where there were no reporters and people were beaten furiously, all of that was suddenly coming to fore. Cameras from not just the U.S. but from all over the world were there. Indeed, the whole world had the opportunity to see the behaviour of the Chicago police.

**Duane Hall**

The very first night of the Convention they chased us out the park. On Michigan Avenue Bridge there was a line of policemen and the marchers were coming down Michigan Avenue. We'd had a meeting with the police before and they said, "When this happens, there's going to be a confrontation. All the press should go over to the police line so they'll be safe and out of the way." I was going to do what they said. I started towards the police line and this policeman started hitting me. There are pictures that other photographers shot of him hitting me. From then on, after that first night, I knew to shoot and run, shoot and run. I would find policemen doing these things, then I would shoot pictures of them and I would run. They could never catch me.

**Tom Keenan**

We're on foot. I've got a microphone, the other fellow has a tape recorder. I'm talking, and all of a sudden smoke is coming in and I can't breath. I choke out a few words, then we realise that with the push of the crowd and the police, we have to separate, so we unplug the microphone. I walked a block away and saw one of the most remarkable sights I've ever seen. There were people in a very posh restaurant, dining, sitting in the window, behind the glass. This same demonstration we were a part of moved that way. The police had their batons out, and one of them struck the plate glass window. As it shattered, all these people in the restaurant went from one world – the world of being inside a very expensive restaurant – to being part of a tear-gassed demonstration.

**Lance Strate**

They're not used to the fact that the whole world is watching. They're used to operating at a distance, in secret. A newspaper report might say there were protestors and some people were injured by the police who tried to break up the protest, but that doesn't capture what's really going on. But when you've got cameras there, that completely changes the dynamic.



### **Douglas Kellner**

Previously political conventions were completely controlled and orchestrated media events. But the insurrection at the Democratic Convention developed a situation where the spectacle was no longer controlled by the establishment. The Democratic Party was no longer controlling the images of their convention.

### **Duane Hall**

On the front of the jeeps the military had strung a barbed wire net. They lined across the street and started slowly marching towards the crowd. They had a tear gas. It was like a flame thrower. They would shoot the tear gas out over all the people. That was the time I got tear gassed the worst because there were tall buildings on both sides, so it locked the gas in. Once they spray it out, it's not going to be dissipated by the wind.

### **Gordon Quinn**

We were riding north on the Outer Drive, across from Lincoln Park, where the Yippies were. We were probably heading home. They had used so much tear gas in the park that the gas came floating out over the Outer Drive and suddenly nobody could see. Their eyes were tearing up and they were choking on tear gas. We were driving, so we all pulled over to the side of the road. Several cars did because there a huge cloud of gas came out of the park. We get out of the cars because the gas got into the car and we wanted some fresh air. This jeep rides by. They all have gas masks on. It's the National Guard. They drop a guy off, a young kid in a gas mask, with his rifle. I don't know what he's supposed to do. We surround this kid and everyone's yelling at him. There were people from several cars, not necessarily people I knew. Obviously he's terrified. He's behind a gas mask. An angry mob is suddenly confronting him and he's all by himself, and we heard his rifle cock. He cocked his rifle.

### ***Medium Cool***

Let's get the guys with the cameras!

### **Nicholas von Hoffman**

I was in charge of the street coverage for the *Washington Post*. I remember we had these interns and stragglers of all sorts. I got them together before thing started and said to them, "Remember, you can't file from jail."

### **Duane Hall**

The crowd's getting closer and closer. Streets were full. I was in the middle and couldn't see anything. I also know that the first thing to do is head for the high ground. The high ground at that point was a stoplight in the middle of the street. So I climbed way up on top of the stoplight. They were all around me. The police were

beating people but I was up high. They would beat on the stoplight and tell me to come down, but I wouldn't, and they were too big to come up. The police at that time I don't think had any exercise programmes. Most of them had a big potbelly and would just sit in the car and drive around beating people. They didn't run very fast. I said, "I know they're not coming up." It was hard to climb up to the top of that stoplight, and they had too many people to beat. They didn't need to beat me. I was just sitting there, shooting away. Of course we had deadlines, so we had motorcycle couriers. After the crowd opened up a bit and the crowd started beating them, the motorcycle courier would come by and I would drop the film down to him. He would take it back to the office, so if they did get me, they wouldn't get my film.

### **Richard Flacks**

There's good evidence that the police targeted those people, those that they knew as reporters. There was a large radicalisation of Chicago journalists because of the police attacks.

### *Medium Cool*

Dede

For about a year now, the station's been letting the cops and the FBI study our footage.

John

You're putting me on! You're kidding me! What am I, a fink? How can I go out and cover a story? It's a wonder more cameras haven't been smashed. I want to know why nobody told me what the hell's been going on because you can bet your ass out there in the street they know!

### **Richard Flacks**

That theme in the movie made a lot of sense at the time if you knew anything about how much the media, the actual working press, were appalled at the police behaviour. It certainly had a big impact on their view of a lot of things. One example of how that worked out is that after the Convention there was established a collective called the Chicago Journalism Review. This was a group of regular, daily newspaper reporters who wanted to set up a centre for criticising the media in Chicago after that. What the film shows about the Robert Forster character changing made sense at the time in terms of the actual history that was happening. It also has a larger significance because the story being told there of a person working within the established institutions becoming radicalised was a pretty emblematic story at that point in history for lots of other people.

### **Nicholas von Hoffman**

I hired one of the police chaplains to be with me at all times so that I could go anywhere and no one was going to bother me.

### **Chris Newman**

When the guy was standing here and he had his baton in the air, and he was going to hit me, I didn't even think to ward off his baton with my microphone. I did what every good little sound boy does, I kept on rolling. He was, in my world, a policeman, a trusted authority figure, and he was going to hit me because I was shooting something and I had a badge that identified me. It was unbelievable to me.

### **Nicholas von Hoffman**

When the batons start swinging they aren't going to look at what noggin they hit, so you have to do something if you're going into situations like that. One time I went to a toy store and bought a large doll and a blanket. People don't hit people standing there with a baby. They just don't do it.

### **Tom Hayden**

I wasn't surprised by what happened. We had seen what happened in Chicago after the murder of Dr. King. Lots of people were killed and wounded, and the Mayor gave the notorious shoot-to-kill arsonists and looters order. We knew a fair amount about the Chicago police department's corruption and intimidation tactics.

### **Duane Hall**

The police realised that if we identified people beating people then they would probably be in trouble, so they took their badges and nameplates off so you couldn't recognise any of them.

### **Haskell Wexler**

The police were trying to frustrate our filming and they roughed up our magazines. They know that if they cracked them open the film would be exposed and that would be it for us.

### **Gordon Quinn**

I brought my little camera thinking, "If anything goes down I've got this little camera to record it, and it will give me some protection." I thought I could say, "I'm the press," though I didn't have any credentials. I think it was also a weapon. If somebody tried to hit me I could hit them back with this little chunk of metal. It's almost like holding a little grenade in your hand.

### **Peter Kuttner**

One of the favourite cameras was the Bell and Howell DR70. This was a 16mm version of the Eymo, the only 35mm hand-held camera, spring wound, that they used in World War II. Bell and Howell, which was based in Chicago, came up with a 16mm version that Newsreel people used. The activists in Newsreel liked them because they fit in one hand, and you could literally fight with them. This was a serious consideration. If you were in the middle of a scuffle and the police are coming at you, you had a weapon. You could bounce these cameras off the ground.

**Neil Hickey**

The protestors in Chicago in 1968 understood far more than did the politicians in the Amphitheater the possibility of their getting the message across strongly and more eloquently than the politicians. They did it by staging drama in the streets. That's catnip for cameras. Cameras love drama. You take a camera into a convention hall and you see a couple of guys up on the podium making speeches that are redundant and not particularly interesting. As a result, particularly in Chicago, the television cameras were venturing out into the street because there was wonderful visual stuff going on out there.

**Reuven Frank**

Covering a convention has always seemed to me to be like living in a submarine. There is no world outside. All I knew was what I saw on the monitors, so all I knew of the protests, of the police and the National Guard, is what I saw on tape, and when I heard colleagues, reporters, friends of mine, gasping for breath from the tear-gas while they were trying to describe what was going on, that's what affected me most. But the event was obviously news and my job was to put news on television.

**Michael Margulies**

A lot of times the demonstrators saw cameras and they would flare up for the cameras. There was a little bit of press happening, they didn't know we were making a movie, they thought we might have been Six O'clock News. So there was always activity that we would find, or they would find us.

**Tom Hayden**

We had no influence over what they chose to edit and leave on the cutting room floor. The cameraman is not part of a left-wing political party. The cameraman is part of a right-wing corporation. He's an instrument of a corporate narrative. Certainly they were part of the system. They would not portray us in a positive way. The most you would get out of the media was exposure of some kind of confrontation without the content.

**General John Phipps**

One of the TV commentators, I think he was trying to get a little more attention, said to one of my soldiers, a young one, "Son, would you like to get your picture on national television?" "Just take you rifle and point it at that little black girl." Fortunately, the soldier reacted as he should. He called his sergeant, and we ran that TV outfit clear off the street. I was tempted several times to take an axe and cut someone's TV cables, but I knew I'd just create more problems if I did.

**James Baughman**

It was new in the sense that the Chicago police didn't expect to be monitored. They were used to very fawning treatment from the Chicago news media at that time. What rattled them was that a national medium could step into their city and show them behaving in certain ways that a Chicago TV station might not have reported, or reported with the same enthusiasm.

**Alan Brinkley**

The significance of the broadcasting of these demonstrations was enormous and, of course, it wasn't lost on the demonstrators who famously chanted "The whole world is watching."

***Medium Cool* – protestors**

The whole world is watching! The whole world is watching!

**Eric McLuhan**

The new public surfaces in that one chant: "The whole world." It's not a public, it's a mass audience, and the difference is crucial. A public has this experience individually, one at a time. A mass audience is a large group that participates in the same thing at the same time, and therefore participates in each other.

**Paul Levinson**

It's hyperbole, it's not usually the whole world, it's usually the whole nation at best. But there is something important there, and it speaks to the magic of the camera. There are certain things – magic is the best word for it – and a camera is one of them. Anything in front of a camera, in principle, can be seen by everyone in the world, and it can last forever.

**Lance Strate**

It's this new kind of self-consciousness. The young people are completely aware of this because they're the television generation. That's why they're chanting "The whole world is watching." The older generation, the World War II generation, Mayor Daley who's running these things, are not. They're oblivious to the fact, and it destroyed them.

**Paul Levinson**

The ubiquity of the camera is one of the most profound evolutions of media to happen in the past half-century. Nowadays, everybody has a camera because if you have a smart phone, you have a camera. That itself is revolutionising the world. That began in the 1960s, the portable film and video cameras. You see this in the coverage of the demonstrations in *Medium Cool*. They inserted a profoundly democratising element into our society. There is no better word for it, because for the first time in human history the authorities could not just do whatever they pleased and then lie through their teeth if there were eyewitnesses and most of the time get away with it.

### **Archive – [unidentified]**

I wish a lot more of you had been beaten and knocked to the ground so you'd see what it was like. We've been talking about police brutality, and you've been ignoring us. Since we formed this organisation of associated working press, I've heard some ghastly stories from some of you who have been covering the police beat and know a lot more even than I do about police brutality. Where have you been? Why haven't you been reporting this, and why do you start now you're the ones who are being clubbed?

### **Paul Levinson**

Beginning with the era of *Medium Cool*, now there's a camera person and a camera to tell the truth.

### **Don Rose**

Long before 1968 there had been complaints in the black community about police brutality. The police always denied it and we had never seen documented police brutality. It wasn't until that week of the convention that people began to understand what the black population's concern was about police brutality.

### **Leonard Weinglass**

"The Whole World is Watching" in Chicago was the exposure of the hypocrisy of what the United States was projecting as an ideal democratic state, when in fact you had jeeps with barbed wire, you had machine guns displayed, you had personnel carriers in an American city protecting a fundamental American institution: the process by which the President is selected.

### **David Farber**

By 1968 the anti-war movement knew that the only way it could change public opinion on the war was not really through leaders any more, was not through some charismatic voice from above. It was going to take street protest, grass roots protest, all over the country. But those grass roots protest would have to resonate somehow out into the suburbs, out into the countryside, into the small towns, and in America by that time there's only one way to do that: get on TV.

### **Tom Hayden**

The crowd knew that we were going to be beaten very badly. We were going to pay a price in blood, we were going to be gassed and trampled on. God knows what it was going to do to our futures. But at least the whole world would be watching. We were not invisible. It wasn't done in a dark alley.

**Jonah Raskin**

This is a violent society. It lives by violence, it dies by violence. There's a facade of peace and order and decorum, and we have to tear aside this veil and show people how society is really run, by the police and the nightsticks. We have to create a situation where the police are going to be revealing their true selves and they'll attack the media as well.

**David Farber**

You have to get the message out on TV. People thought about this, about what would be a good image, what would strike people enough to make them change their hearts and minds about these issues, so the media became completely implicated in both sides of the war: the anti-war movement and those who meant to continue the war. Both were using the media as much as they could. It wasn't a fair fight. The anti-war movement had to use guerrilla tactics to get airtime, whereas the media would accurately reflect back what presidents and generals and big politicians said.

**Tom Hayden**

Protest should be colourful. There should be some theatricality. But a point was reached where it was as if McLuhan had replaced Marxism, and that you should dress for being on stage. This was auditioning for a part in a revolution. But that meant serious organisers were never on television, and clowns were.

**David Farber**

By the time you hit Chicago, you've got this hyper-politicised atmosphere surrounding the media. The media is trying not to be puppets of one side or the other. They're trying to do their jobs. But what is their job? Are they entertainers? Are they newsmakers? Are they new reflectors? That was a question people were asking themselves within the media – reporters and cameraman, as well as people outside – as every force tried to use television as a reflecting mirror back to the American people of who they had become and what they should be.

**Todd Gitlin**

For several years there was a certain self-consciousness in different parts of the movement, first in the Civil Rights movements and then, after 1965 or so, in the anti-war movement, that you were on stage, that when you were demonstrating you were producing a performance and your performance was radiating outward. This is the first time that there's an awareness in the street that the images are instantly being flashed around.

### **Archive – Walter Cronkite**

The first blow was the telephone strike. Mayor Daley's agreement with the union to install equipment only at this convention hall left downtown hotels with their candidate's headquarters without adequate service for live television. Mayor Daley said such coverage was none of his concern. The Secret Service contributed to the news difficulties by severely limiting the use of cameras on windows and rooftops.

### **David Farber**

Because the media are so politicised by 1968, and everybody knew that the kind of coverage the Democratic Convention of 1968 would get would really impact the politics of that election year, every angle was being pulled. Ironically, in the midst of all this highfaluting politics, the guys who lay the cable that make sure that TV cameras back then can run properly, that the lights can run, go on strike. These're just working class guys looking for a better wage. There's no politics involved in it per se, but this strike in the middle of this politicised media just becomes a political football and everybody's trying to kick it. So Daley, the mayor of Chicago, looks at this strike and says, "Hey, maybe this isn't so bad. I can control the media a lot better this way if they can't lay cable, if they can't have cameras everywhere they want, they can't put the lights out."

### **Reuven Frank**

Reporters would call me and said, "What are you going to do about Chicago?" I said, "We're going to do live and if we can't do live we'll do tape, and if we can't do tape we'll do film and if we can't do film we'll use sketch artist." Somehow or other we're going to cover the convention. For a while it looks like they were going to move the convention from Chicago. When they started talking about that, they started making arrangements that the signal from the convention hall itself would be transmitted, but there would be no signals from outside broadcast units, which is where the protests would be.

### **Archive – TV news anchor**

This is on tape, since again we're not able to cover it live. The tape you're about to see was made about thirty to forty minutes ago.

### **Reuven Frank**

It happened that the motorcycle couriers became key to this whole operation. When the kids were saying "The Whole World is Watching" they weren't watching at that time. What they were doing was being recorded on videotape and somehow or other would get to one of our two transmission centres, either at the hall itself or the NBC station near the Chicago river. That's what they did physically. When the reel was full, they took it off the machine and gave it to a motorcycle courier, and there might be twenty minutes on that reel or there might be an hour. He would take it to a transmission point so there could be a lag of between thirty minutes and an hour and a half.



### **William Rainbolt**

By the 1960s we have this very influential book by Daniel Boorstin called *The Image* about “pseudo-events,” event that are intentionally created to be filmed or reported. “Pseudo-event” was a term that Boorstin created and used, but this has been a long tradition in American journalist, long before visual imaging.

### **Lance Strate**

Daniel Boorstin coined the term “pseudo event” and talked about how when you create a new medium, the first thing that happens is that people say, “Well, what are we going to do with it? What are we going to put in it?” You have to find a way to create content for it. With newspapers, a new medium is introduced and something like an interview is invented in the mid-nineteenth century, which nobody ever did before and no one thought to do. But now they’re putting out a daily paper and they have to find things to put in it. Not enough things actually happen to report on, so they have to make news rather than gather news. If you think about it, an interview is not an event. It’s created by the reporter. A lot of other things are spawned from this. On the journalists’ side you have interviews and investigative journalism, creating the news. This also give rise to people taking advantage of this, so people create publicity stunts and press releases and press conferences, and various kinds of news leaks come into being.

### **William Rainbolt**

By the 1960s, we have this overwhelming visual culture, especially in television news that can easily respond to “pseudo-events.” One of the reasons they can be so widely reported it because they are very easy to cover. You just show up and someone will be doing something you can report.

### **Lance Strate**

When television arrives something really odd happens because up to this point it’s pretty clear what is an actual event and what isn’t. But with television that actually starts to blur media events because when you have people protesting, for example, and you see that the protesters are not doing anything until the TV cameras show up, and then they start doing things.

### **Ian Christie**

There are stories from Northern Ireland about riots going on in the streets, and come the six o’clock news everything falls quiet because people go in to see if they’re on television, then back out again. So the kind of interplay between that sense of what you’re doing in the streets and whether it’s being reflected in the media was in many people’s minds all over the world.

**Lance Strate**

What's going on is real, but there's also a sense in which the camera is changing everything. By being there, it's effecting people's behaviour. There was a sense in which they were doing it to get on the news and get reported.

**Todd Gitlin**

In the streets themselves many people said, "Look, we are enacting a sort of self-crucifixion here. We are carrying a cross into the public square, and when it is seen that we are getting our heads cracked for the public sins, then there will a redemptive reversal and America will pull itself up straight and say, 'The war is unbearable and it must be stopped.'" But of course America was more complicated than that.

***Medium Cool* - protestor**

NBC, come back! Stay with us!

**Ian Christie**

By the time the film was made in 1969, that was absolutely in people's minds. They knew that if you didn't have an image appearing on the screen, then your struggle, your protest was not being heard.

**Lance Strate**

In the new television environment we're not only in the centre of information, gathering it in, but we're always potentially being monitored, being on-screen and being part of the story. There's no separation.

**Ian Christie**

Around this time, the image of the cameraman holding a camera up becomes almost a political image. I think this is very relevant to *Medium Cool*. You actually see people holding cameras. It becomes a new kind of recognisable image which is present in May 1968. Many of the images of May 68 show people in the act of filming on the streets. It's interesting to think what this image means. It means somebody who is right in there, a part of the action, bearing witness, carrying it back to audiences elsewhere.

**Alan Brinkley**

The broadcasting of these demonstrations created a tremendous anger towards the police among many people, including most of the journalists in Chicago who were covering the event and who covered it with a tremendous critical eye towards what the police had done. But the public reaction, the broader popular reaction to these riots, was tremendous anger at the demonstrators.

**Todd Gitlin**

There was something of a delusion, which I know well because I shared it during much of that week in Chicago, that because the police were so flagrantly brutal, that the audience would instantly understand that we were the good guys. So it came as a tremendous shock in the days afterwards, when polls started to come out showing that substantial majorities of people who saw this footage sided with the police.

**Alan Brinkley**

It was an early sign of a great disconnect between the media, which at that point had on the whole a fairly liberal bias, and the larger public which might sympathise with liberals on some issues but did not have the instinctive distrust of authority and of the police that so many liberals had absorbed by the late Sixties.

## The Medium is the Message

### Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970

- Interviewer How far do you think television in fact really affects people and makes them more involved in life, more responsible, and how far does it have the reverse effect?
- Haskell Wexler The problem is not the media. The media has done a pretty good job, but it's sort of backfired in that when you can see things over, it becomes a show, and when it becomes less involving, and when it becomes less involving then your responsibility to it diminishes.
- Interviewer The only way you could possibly force people to feel responsible watching TV is putting on items that constantly criticise TV.
- Haskell Wexler I think TV is too easy to criticise. American television is easy to criticise. But still, there's an inherent problem in presenting things on the glass tube, and I don't think we know how to deal with that information yet. The gap between immediate sensory, emotional response to a situation and televised replay, film response... We haven't learned how to deal with that yet.

### Ian Christie

Marshall McLuhan was an obscure Toronto academic who became one of the most influential people in the mid-Sixties through a series of books that really made media the centre of people's attention. Before that there wasn't really a theory of media that anybody believed in. By the time McLuhan had published three or four books, everyone knew that media were a vital part of the modern world and that the traditional idea that the medium carries the message probably should be turned on its head. The message is the medium.

### Lance Strate

McLuhan, more than anyone in his time, pinpointed television as being an entirely new and different medium. Different from radio and newspapers. Pretty much everyone else had lumped them together as forms of mass media. McLuhan was saying there is an incredible gap, an incredible revolution, between the older forms of print media and the new forms of electronic media. Beyond that, television brings it into its penultimate form. It remained for the Internet to fully realise all the things that McLuhan was talking about. But in its time, television had fully realised the potential, up to that point, of electronic media.

### **Paul Levinson**

McLuhan lived and breathed the media. He thought about it them twenty-four hours a day. Television was the main medium, and he thought about television all the time. He watched television not as anybody else would because thought he might have enjoyed a given programme, but what he say every time he watched television was further grist for his theorisation and probing about what impact television was having upon us. So in addition to everything else, he was a constant witness to what the new media at this time were doing.

### **Ian Christie**

What's the relationship between the spectator and what they see on this rather small screen with this rather attenuated sound? McLuhan was rather interested in how much information you got from a medium and how that defined your relationship to it. He started off as a scholar of print. He went right back to the question of the impact of printing. How did that change people's relationship to the written word. He then carried this idea forward and tried to look at the new media of cinema, recorded sound, television and radio, in the same spirit, applying the same attitude that he'd applied to what happened between medieval monastery culture and the new culture of popular print.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

We've seen how print affected all aspects of our lives. Industry, education, the concept of the modern army even. Our managerial class is a product of print culture, so is the idea of romantic love. The media are at the heart of our life because the media work through our sense. Print is a medium that changed our sense make-up to what it had been in the Middle Ages, and now certainly these other media will do the same. Photography, movies, radio, TV – all these change at once the way in which we see or hear or touch or feel ourselves and our world. A slight change in one of our five senses alters the ratio among the rest. People suddenly begin to want and appreciate different things. They begin to think differently.

### **Paul Levinson**

What McLuhan was trying to make sense of this new media constellation that we had. It's important to bear in mind that in the 1960s, television was the new media, so no one knew what to expect. The best you could say about it – and people were saying it – was that it was “radio with pictures.” You have a radio network, now you're got a television network. You have a Western on the radio, now you've got a Western on the television. You've got radio news, now you've got news on television. That's what everyone was saying. But McLuhan put that on its head and said, “No, it's not just radio with pictures, because when you put the pictures in, that transforms the medium and makes it something new.” That's really what he was talking about when he said “the medium is the message.” The content would be identical on radio and television, but the experience for the viewer was completely different.

### **Ian Christie**

The phrase that was in so many people's minds at the time it was made was Marshall McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message." McLuhan had made the word "medium" a word on everyone's lips and minds. Suddenly people were aware of media like they'd never been aware of them before, and they knew that everything was a medium, not just traditional media. Anything could be a medium according to McLuhan. The important thing about McLuhan is not necessarily that he was a profound thinker – though in many ways he was light years ahead of his time – or that people understood him, which most people didn't. The important thing is he planted that seed of doubt, the awareness that media were not transparent.

### **Terrence Gordon**

What I find interesting about Wexler's film is that in many ways it's a commentary on many of the chapters in *Understanding Media*. There were, of course, people working in television at the time who snapped up copies of *Understanding Media* because they thought it was a book that would help them to produce better television, and they were very surprised when they opened it and found that there was one chapter on television, one on radio, one on film. But there were twenty-four other chapters dealing with things like credit cards, comic books, manuscript illustrations, and that was perhaps a little disappointing if all you wanted was a handbook about making better television. McLuhan wasn't interested in making better television, he was interested in explaining why television as a new medium was radically transforming the organisation and pattern of society at the time.

### **Todd Gitlin**

I think that what Haskell Wexler must have done is pick up the concept out of the air. First journalists and then people in advertising and in the media itself were glomming onto McLuhan, to put it crudely, because he came around and made the media really important, so anyone who was working in the media said, "Aha! There's our guru. He says we're the cat's meow, we're the cutting edge." In the process some of what he said made sense and a lot of it didn't, but in any case, he very easily lent himself to the promotional purposes that many people had.

### **Haskell Wexler**

The name *Medium Cool* came from the suggestion of one of the actors. I had read some Marshall McLuhan. I couldn't understand him, and when people later asked me about the meaning of *Medium Cool*, the name and the title of the film and Marshall McLuhan, I referred them to a library to see if they could figure out what the hell he was talking about.

### **Eric McLuhan**

Study the word “medium” and the rest opens up. My father actually wrote a chapter about this in *Understanding Media*. He said a medium is an environment of services and changes in your habits and your culture that a new technology puts in place. It doesn’t matter what the content of the technology is. It changes everything around you.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

When you say “the medium is the message” what you’re really saying is that the ground is the message, not the content. It’s not what you say on the telephone, it’s the fact that the telephone service is environmental.

### **Terrence Gordon**

“The medium is the message” means that the medium itself, how the information is conveyed, is the chief source of effects in the sense of influence or power to transform us, because the media is actually obliging us to take in that information in new ways.

### **Eric McLuhan**

The medium wasn’t the content of the people who work in it or the politicians or the advertisers. The medium is that entire constellation of changes that takes place around you the moment you introduce this new technology. The way, for example, that lives are re-arranged and the energies of the culture are changed and moved about and re-organised. That’s the medium. The content is there to give you the illusion that you’re in charge, or to give you something to look at while the medium does its work. T. S. Eliot had a nice way of look at it. He said the function of meaning or content in a poem – and it applied to all media – is like that choice piece of meat the burglar carries when he visits your house. He says it’s there to keep the dog busy. So the meaning is there to keep the mind busy while the medium goes about its work. If you talk about medium, you should begin immediately to look at things like the pace and the scale of human activity and human sensibility, and how that’s modified. You talk about the medium of TV, people immediately think about programmes and programmers and advertisers, and so on. But they don’t look at how, say, Hollywood was changed or how their attitude to imagery was changed as a result, and how their sensibilities and a whole range of things – their taste in food, in dress – all changed because of what TV did to them.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

People who are subjected to the arrangement of language visually, in lines – highly sequential and precise, rigid – develop habits of arranging their lives, arranging their whole social existence in ways closely geared to these forms. They’re not especially aware of this. Lineality is not characteristic of radio or television or movies. So we have been subjected to tremendous new forces and influences which have broken up the older habits acquired from the print world.





**Paul Levinson**

Look at Harold’s astute analysis of television, and where it belongs and where it doesn’t belong.

**Terrence Gordon**

I’m quite convinced that young Harold would have been McLuhan’s favourite character in the film because Harold actually sees that the tremendous educational value of television is absolutely wasted.

**Paul Levinson**

That is a classic McLuhan-esque analysis which gets to the point that it’s not just the medium, it’s the medium within the medium. We rarely if ever have just the medium, and for McLuhan any communication environment was a medium. So in the medium of the classroom, the television is a grossly inappropriate medium. What the classroom should be is a “hot” medium: interaction between teacher and students, in person, full exchange on all levels. Sticking this television in there is like basically like when you’re warm and comfortable, someone comes and spills a bucket of ice down your back. That’s that Harold is saying. He doesn’t want this “coolness” in his classroom, though it’s fine to watch it at home. Harold gets that, John doesn’t, so for me Harold is speaking with McLuhan’s voice in that segment.

**Terrence Gordon**

Harold’s mother, of course, is a teacher and obviously has instilled some respect and a belief in the virtues of literate culture in the boy. He is very much a unique character in that he is very much pre-disposed to “electric hegemony” as McLuhan called it. In some sense, symbolically in the film, he is the champion of literate culture.

**Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

Interviewer	Why should all this talk about media mean that individual man is on the way out, and tribal man is on the way in? Why is this big change taking place?
Marshall McLuhan	To answer that, let’s get back to the teenager, for he illustrates the changes brought about by media in the clearest way, especially if we contrast the teenager with his old-time contemporary, the adolescent.
Interviewer	You mean there’s a difference between the adolescent and the teenager?
Marshall McLuhan	Yes, and I’d say it’s the same kind of difference between book culture and the electronic era. The adolescent corresponds to the world of the book, the teenage to the electronic era. The adolescent is seeking self-definition, seeking to isolate his uniqueness from that of others,

seeking to relate his self to others. The adolescent knew he wasn't an adult. He knew he was in life's waiting room, that his life was not really real life. That would begin only with adulthood. The adolescent is still our image of what the young person should be.

### **Lance Strate**

In a way Harold is the most McLuhan-like – as opposed to McLuhan-esque – character in the whole film because he represents exactly the sensibility that McLuhan would have favoured. In funny kind of reversal, he's the most old-school of the characters in being a reader. The pigeon harkens back to an older media environment where we're not going the speed of light. Once the telegraph is introduced, we're moving at the speed of light. We have instantaneous communication that doesn't involve physical transportation. It's just the transmission of signals through electrical energy. Take a step back from that and the carrier pigeon is used as a way to transport written messages. The message is written out by hand, which is even before printing. This is an ancient form of communication, a way to communicate over distance in as quickly a means as possible. It's very much in defiance of what television is all about.

### **Paul Levinson**

The reason that pigeons are in *Medium Cool* is because Wexler was supposed to make a movie about pigeons, but guess what? It turns out that the pigeons are also a communication medium historical marker because Baron Julius Von Reuter – the guy who gave Reuters, the news agency, its name – before he became the first person to use the telegraph to get information from one place to another instantly, he started his organisation using carrier pigeons. So the pigeon is an archetypal, pre-technological mode of news communication. It's how reporters got their stories.

### **Terrence Gordon**

McLuhan was never advocating “electric hegemony,” he was trying to explain it to us and constantly trying to explain its effects to us. If you read very carefully what he said there are some wonderful quotations from McLuhan. One that sticks in my mind especially is when he says, “I don't say that I approve of the global village, I say that we live in it.”

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

I am determined to understand what's happening. I don't choose to sit and let the juggernaut roll over me. Many people seem to think if you talk about something recent, you're in favour of it. The exact opposite is true in my case. Anything I talk about is almost certainly something I'm resolutely against. It seems to be the best way to oppose it is to understand, and then you know where to turn off the button.

### **Paul Levinson**

Harold dreams about that because the pre-technological environment is always the template against which we measure – whether consciously or unconsciously – what’s happening in our real world. That’s because we come hard-wired pre-technologically. Two people, three people just talking. What are the other characteristics of that system? Anybody can start talking, anybody can stop talking. You can reach out and touch the person you’re talking to. The person you’re talking to sees you in full dimension, gets all your facial expressions and is able, therefore, to get a much richer kind of communication. To this day, in 2013, and certainly not in 1969, we have yet to replicate anything like that in our technological communication, so even if we’re talking about a conversation through video phone, that’s better because we can see the person’s face, but it’s not exactly the same.

Each time we invent a medium, we’re trying to do two things with that medium. One, extend – as per McLuhan – the communication further than it was before, whether instantly, whether better recorded. Two – and this is the point that’s often missed – recapture elements of the pre-technological world that earlier media have taken out of the picture or eclipsed or prevented us from using. We actually see that with the invention of writing, aptly considered by historians to be the cornerstone of civilisation. When we learned how to write, that meant people could get information even if the author of that information was dead, no longer physically present. But look at what was sacrificed. No sound, no image, no touch. None of that. Ever since then, every invention has tried to extend what we can do with writing, but also retrieve elements of physical interpersonal, face-to-face communication that we lost. That, I think, is the most important significance of the Harold dream scenes, because in this world – where Harold is reading and watching television, where everyone is caught up in images and sounds – what does Harold dream about? Walking through this bucolic field, talking, person-to-person, with his father.

### **Philip Marchand**

McLuhan, in 1968, in an article he wrote for *Saturday Night Magazine*, said, “Look. The candidates – Nixon, Humphrey, and so on – don’t have a clue as to what’s happening.” And if you read that article, regardless of what you think of McLuhan’s distinctions between hot and cool media, you have to realize that he had a much, much better sense of what television and in fact was doing. Because of its tendency to involve the viewer, it was going to erode all these old institutions and structures and instruments which were much more detached.

### **Fred MacDonald**

Marshall McLuhan developed this dichotomy in which he saw an individual medium – radio, TV, film, magazines – as either hot or cool. If it’s hot you step back and let it bowl you over because the flames, the heat is too high. Motion pictures are hot. They’re big, they’re massive, they’re loud. Television is a cool medium. Television draws you in, and you have to go into it to warm it up, to fill it out.

### **Todd Gitlin**

The text that you read in print is very well-defined. It leaves you relatively little room as an interpreter to make of it what you will. In that sense it binds the reader. McLuhan calls that binding heat, hotness. Television for him was the opposite. Television provides a relatively imprecise picture which people then have to go about filling in on their own. It makes the audience more active. I think this is nonsense, sheer nonsense.

### **Ian Christie**

McLuhan had a very interesting idea, which was that there were hot media and cool media. And some media drew us in, because they were a kind of low definition, and we became more involved because they didn't give us high definition information. Other media, like cinema, give us a lot of information, and so we sit back and we're not so involved.

### **Douglas Kellner**

The title *Medium Cool* is an attack on McLuhan. McLuhan says television is a cool medium. It chills out the audience. It basically turns the audience into couch potatoes. Their position is to sit at home as consume images passively, whereas the movie *Medium Cool* shows that television is a very hot medium, part of the process of history in the making, through newsreel, through *cinéma-vérité*.

### **Paul Levinson**

McLuhan and Wexler have many things in common. Among them, they have such a deep understanding of the human psyche and how that pertains to communication. They did things – in the case of Wexler he filmed things, in the case of McLuhan, he wrote and talked about things – which they weren't even totally aware of doing. McLuhan, for example, talks about the “global village” in 1962. But there was no global communication back then, and it certainly wasn't a village. It was a one-way national village at most, and a village of voyeurs because they could see and receive information, but they couldn't send information. The “global village” awaited the advent of the Internet and what we have today, where anyone with any little device in their hand can hook into the process and communicate. Haskell Wexler may not have understood McLuhan, and he says he didn't understand McLuhan, but on some very profound level he did completely. There are many examples in the film of this, but one that really struck me is in the black militant house.

### ***Medium Cool***

Muhil Richard Abrams      Man, you mean to tell me they talk to you and you can't even talk back?

Jeff Donaldson              He's a receiver and not a sender!

**Paul Levinson**

That is a perfect analysis of what McLuhan was talking about when he said television was a “cool” medium, because television is a one-way medium that you cannot talk back to. All you can do as a general member of the public is watch television, and then you’re left with this inchoate feeling that you have to reach out and touch someone to make up for the lack of sending possibility that you have as a viewer of television. That scene captures that perfectly, because all of us are like that soundman when it comes to television. All of us only get the information sent to us and we can talk to the screen all we want, but the people on the other side of the screen can’t hear us. In a way, it awaits the arrival of the Internet to get two-way and multiple communication.

**Terrence Gordon**

If the medium is “cool,” the user is “hot.” If the medium is “hot,” the user is “cool.” In other words, you don’t participate in the printed page, but you have no choice but to participate in the image which you are actually constructing by watching the television screen, whether it be an image of the Vietnam War or the Civil Rights movement.

**Neil Hickey**

In both of those big stories, television was central. In civil rights you had the sit-ins in the South and the brutality of Southern sheriffs. This brought home the story more so than any other possible way could, and it made the country aware for the first time. A whole new version of politics emerged in the Fifties and Sixties. You can’t survive without being on television as a politician.

**Archive – John F. Kennedy**

Can we honestly say that it doesn’t affect our security and our fight for peace when Negroes and others are denied their full constitutional rights?

**Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

Think of the tremendous shift in political power that’s going on at this moment through the use of television in politics. McCarthy folded in a week after he went on television. If Huey Long had gone on the TV he would have been a flop at once. TV will not take a sharp character, a hot character. It’s a cool medium, and our politics are being cooled off to the point of rigor mortis.

**Fred MacDonald**

Hitler was a hot medium guy. He stood up there and screamed and hollered, but on a little screen, McLuhan suggests, Hitler would be a joke. He’s too loud, he’s too silly and over the top to really be believable. His rhetoric is not even important. It’s just the way it comes across on the medium. That’s the message.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

The nature of this medium, which calls for so much participation, does not give you a completed package or a completed image. You have to make the image as you go. Therefore, if the person who comes in front of the TV camera is already a complete and classifiable type of person – a politician, a highly obvious doctor or lawyer type – the medium rejects him because there's nothing left of the audience to complete. They say, "This guy's a phoney."

### **Fred MacDonald**

John Kennedy, a Senator from Massachusetts, wrote an article in *TV Guide* in 1959 in which he described this phenomenon. He talked about the new breed of politician that was going to be necessary or really make it in the future because he could really exploit TV. He would be young, he would be vigorous, he'd look healthy, he'd be good-looking, all the attributes television eats up.

### **Archive – *The Making of the President, 1960***

This is the signature in the sky of a revolution, a revolution Americans call television. Ten years ago only four million homes had television. Now it reaches into forty-four million homes. It is about to show its blast effect on politics. Congress has made possible direct TV debate by Presidential candidates for first time, and Chicago will be the scene of the first great debate.

In the studio, producer Don Hewitt prepares for the arrival of Nixon and Kennedy. Representatives of the candidates inspect and approve each detail of preparation, down to the shade of grey and painting of the sets.

Vice President Nixon is the first to arrive. He has campaigned right through this morning, and paused only this afternoon for solitary rest without staff or entourage in a hotel room. Now he listens while the rules of TV debate are explained.

Both fall silent now, as airtime approaches, composing themselves, as the largest audience in political history prepares to measure two men for leadership. All across the land parents shush children. It's eight thirty, September 26, and as millions bend forward to hear the next President, they hear...

The audience for this debate is almost too huge to measure. This is the first of four. Researchers will claim each debate caught the attention of nearly seventy million Americans.

### **Fred MacDonald**

At the same time a year or so before there had been a debate going on. What's going to happen to the great candidate but he's not good-looking?

### **Archive – John Kennedy**

In the election of 1860, Abraham Lincoln said the question was whether this nation could exist half-slave or half-free.

### **Fred MacDonald**

In 1960, John Kennedy used a little bit of a tanning solution on his skin to make him look like he'd just come out of the sun. Richard Nixon – who had hurt his knee and had a touch of the phlebitis and was literally out of the hospital for only a few days – looked wan and drawn and very white-looking. He starts to perspire under the heat of the lights.

### **Archive – *The Making of the President, 1960***

Kennedy directs himself not so much to Nixon as to the unseen audiences of the nation. Nixon, however, in debater style, addresses himself chiefly to Kennedy.

### **Fred MacDonald**

Kennedy looks like a million dollars in a dark suit, Nixon is wearing a grey suit. All the things wrong for a television picture Nixon did. This well-known vice president of a popular president is beaten by a relatively obscure senator from Massachusetts who looks real good on TV.

### **Paul Levinson**

Everyone agrees that John F. Kennedy bested Nixon, and bested him badly in the Kennedy-Nixon Presidential debates that led up to the 1960 election. What McLuhan did is ratchet up that analysis one step further. It was more than Nixon looked nervous and sweaty, and Kennedy looked calm and confident. What McLuhan saw in that debate was Kennedy looking “cool.” Actually “cool” in terms of not sweating, literally, but also “cool” culturally. Calm, relaxed, on top of it. When he saw Nixon looking too hot because he was sweating, but also too “hot” culturally, overbearing, glaring into the camera, making these expressions. Would you buy a used car from this man?

### **Archive – *The Making of the President, 1960***

With this debate, the Nixon claim was shaken. Moreover, ill at ease, under strain, dressed in a suit of grey that blends into the background, Nixon in this first debate leaves a disappointing image in the minds of millions of Americans. For years men will argue who won or lost the debate, but political analysts will agree that these political debates were the single most important episode of the campaign. Overnight, TV has given Kennedy star quality. Public response soars.

### **Paul Levinson**

In earlier eras, the hot candidate would have been very successful because the media were different. Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the Thirties was a hot candidate. He was extremely emotive to the camera and radio. His radio addresses exhorted people

to excellence. They were inspiring. But by 1960, the thermometer of our culture had cooled down because of television, McLuhan thought. He was right, because television presented these very scanty black and white images, so someone who was over-articulating, like Nixon, who maybe even had the logical edge on Kennedy, doesn't play well on television.

### **Jonah Raskin**

It's best to be understated on television, so the old-fashioned political campaigner who's out there and haranguing the masses and throwing himself around doesn't really work for television.

### **Terrence Gordon**

The whole issue there is the clash between the hot media and politicians who are the old style, prone to favouring well-defined issues.

### **Philip Marchand**

Once people submit to this medium, they are submitting to being worked over by a medium. They're almost giving over the rights to their senses, to this force.

### **Eric McLuhan**

The whole world was watching on television, which says that the whole world is being re-made by television. It doesn't matter what the programme is.

### **Archive – Martin Luther King**

We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now.

### *Medium Cool*

Martin Luther King	I just want to do God's will. And he's allowed me to go up to the mountain.
John	Jesus, I love to shoot film.
Martin Luther King	I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land.

### **Ian Christie**

We don't see the image on the screen. We sense two different looks at the screen. We hear the soundtrack. We see him viscerally excited. He's really getting off on this sense of being there filming. We see her looking at it, and it's very different for her.



**William Rainbolt**

On the one hand we have John. He's at a distance. He's critical, sophisticated about the filmmaking, he's analytical, he's certainly cynical about it. He's talking to her about this, but Eileen is in the experience of the emotion. Eileen is not African-American. She's a poor, white Southern woman from Appalachia, and the War on Poverty is not a metaphor for her and her son Harold. It is real for her. She is watching a preacher preach to her that there will be saving. That's the message that she can react to emotionally.

**Archive – Martin Luther King**

And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you.

**William Rainbolt**

It's about a reverential power that an image can have for those who see it with almost with what can be called "a sacred gaze."

**Archive – Martin Luther King**

But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

**William Rainbolt**

She has a line to the effect of, "This makes me think of church back home."

*Medium Cool*

Martin Luther King

...and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

Eileen

Goosebumps. Reminds me of a church down home, sitting there with Clovis and grandma and Buddy.

**William Rainbolt**

For him it's well-done script, but if not literally she is in every other way – emotionally – back home in a church. It's the difference in the experiences to the image. He's very smart about it and knows exactly what's going on. He knows how CBS produced and did this documentary. She knows nothing about all of that and in fact, thanks to her eyes and the way reacts and looks, it's clear she has no idea what he's talking about. For her it's the emotionality. This image is real to her. He knows it's constructed reality, but she knows nothing about that and frankly I don't think she cares. She's inside the experience.

### **Terrence Gordon**

Television, for McLuhan, is just one of the extensions of man. An extension is what? Anything that extends our senses, and especially that extends our senses in a way that gives them a new intensity.

### ***Medium Cool***

John

Feel it? X-rays, is that what it is? Does it grow hair, is it vitamins? Can you feel violence?

### **Terrence Gordon**

That's really a quintessential McLuhan moment because what Ketsalis shows is his intuition that the television is a tactile medium. What you watch on television is not nearly as important as the fact that you're using your eye in a different way than the way you use your eye if you were taking in the same information by looking at a printed page.

### **Paul Levinson**

McLuhan's understanding of the religious intensity and appeal of television can be best understood by another one of his distinctions. He liked to talk about "light on" versus "light through" media. What is a "light on" medium? Anything that light bounces off, and then we see what the light has bounced off. It could be, for example, watching in a movie theatre. The light bounces off a screen and we see it when the project is in back of us. It could be a book printed on paper. Light bounces off it, and we see it. "Light through," McLuhan realised, is a far more profound and involving way for us to get information. As a matter of fact, if you think about what "light through" communication is before television, it's stain-glassed windows. You sit in a church and look out and you see the light shining through those windows. It's not bouncing off from the inside. It's coming through from the light outside. It permeates the room that you're in. The sky itself is "light through." It's not light bouncing off the ceiling of the sky, it's the sun's light coming through the atmosphere. Both of those, whether we're thinking of heaven in the sky or light coming through stain-glassed windows, for some physiological reason – and it is physiological and psychological – moves us, and gets us to want to be closer to that object. Television, unlike motion pictures on a screen, does the same thing. I think that's the way everyone is when they watch television. *Medium Cool* get at that quality by showing the television screens, and whether it's the people who produce what goes on, like John, whether it's other people, everyone is drawn to those screens. It almost doesn't matter what the content is, whether it's Martin Luther King or something else. That screen in front of us pulls us into it.

### **William Rainbolt**

The visual image has a much more unadulterated and emotional power to go right to you, a much more direct way of reaching into someone and saying, “Forget that you’re actually watching something constructed. You are there.” The question became: where does television news fit into this? It’s great power is not in the transmission of information, it’s in the transmission of experience.

### **Lance Strate**

Ketsalis is perfectly at home in this environment. In this film, he is television. He embodies the electronic sensibility, this new kind of culture which is tribal in a brand new, unprecedented way. But Eileen works in a factory, so there’s a paradox that she’s creating the TV sets but they’re created industrially by the old mechanical means. She’s more in this old camp, coming from Appalachia and West Virginia she very much out of sorts in this new environment and puzzled by it. When he stands there and says, “Can you feel it?” he is completely absorbed and immersed.

### **William Rainbolt**

*Medium Cool* is saying that this is the television visual culture of 1968/69 and it is all about images, it’s not about scripts. It’s not about information, it’s about experience, and you watching.

### ***Medium Cool***

John

The media’s got a script. By the numbers. Flags at half-mast. Trips cancelled. Ballgames called off. Schools closed. Memorial meetings. Memorial marches. Moments of silence. The widow cries and then she says grave words. More moments of silence. Then the funeral procession.

### **Douglas Kellner**

The notion of “media events” was coined in the 1960s after a lot of these major events took place through television. The assassination and funeral of JFK and the aftermath, the Civil Rights movements, the big demonstrations which took place, to some extent, in the media, in some cases live on television.

### **Michael Arlen**

What television brought to the country and the world is the sense of a shared information experience that had not obtained before. Stuff coming in from the outside world that was a kind of shared experience as opposed from discrete reading experiences. Television is a domesticated form of communication.

**Archive – Kennedy assassination television news coverage**

### **Neil Hickey**

The events of the succeeding days were so dramatic that all of the networks, the three of them back then, so dominant back then, in 1963, before cable, before anything. They all cleared the time morning to night. There were no commercials for four whole days from the time of the assassination until after the funeral parade and burial. It was a terrible wrench to the nation's system. Television truly performed a service at that time. It had the nation come to this hearth and grieve together in a way that the nation had never grieved together before, nor could have since there was no common ground upon which to share this terrible moment.

### **Archive – Kennedy assassination television news coverage**

#### **Fred MacDonald**

If television is our tribal meeting place where we as a nation come together through a programme to experience and vent national tragedy, it's understandable that the assassinations would be our national church, our national spiritual abode where we came together to mourn the murder of a President in 1963, of a moral, religious leader in Martin Luther King in 1968, and then two months later the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, an aspiring candidate for the Democratic nomination to be President of the United States.

#### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

Interviewer

What does this all mean, the book world that we had the electronic world we have.

Marshall McLuhan

I think the best distinction might be found in the phrase "with it." You know how we speak of being "with it," meaning we've understood completely, we've got the message as it were, in every way possible. But in the older book or print culture, people were not "with it." They were away from it, by themselves, with their own private point of view. Now, you'll have no point of view when you're "with it" because you accept something totally. We're "with it" because these new media of ours – the one you talked about in the appliance store – have made our world into a single unit. The world is now like a continually sounding tribal drum where everybody gets the message, all the time. A princess gets married in England, and boom, boom go the drums. We all hear about it. An earthquake in North Africa, a Hollywood star gets drunk, away go the drums again. I use the word "tribal." It is probably the key word of this whole half hour.

Interviewer                      Why do you use the word “tribal”?  
Marshall McLuhan              Well, I think you’ll find everything we’ve observed  
   tonight about the media points in the direction of tribal  
   man and away from individual man.  
Interviewer                      By “individual man” I assume you’re referring to John’s  
   literary man?  
Marshall McLuhan              Yes, and tribal man is the man created by the new  
   electronic media.

### **Michael Arlen**

Societies now gather under television where they used to gather in churches and cathedrals.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

We’re re-tribalising. Involuntarily we’re getting rid of individualism. We’re in a process of making a tribe. Where just as books and their private point of view are being replaced by new media, so the concepts that underlie our actions, our social lives are changing. We’re no longer so concerned with self-definition, with finding our own individual way. We’re more concerned with what the group knows, with feeling as it does, with acting with it, not apart from it.

### **Michael Arlen**

Television is at the forefront of creating a kind of social, sacral theatre for society. People, it turns out, have a yearning for be a part of a larger group.

### **Lance Strate**

When they filmed Robert Kennedy’s funeral, what it invokes is John Kennedy’s funeral, and that is generally acknowledged as the first great national ritual that everyone joined in on. The vast majority of people watched this on television and participated in this terribly sad funeral ritual, this national mourning in a way that no one had ever done before. It had never existed before. After a little while, that tragedy is no longer now. It’s the past, so it gets forgotten and pushed aside by whatever is coming up next. We don’t have the delayed response or the time to really think about it and evaluate and consider it. We’re always moving forward into the present. It’s the speeding up of all activity. This is one of McLuhan’s really powerful points about how speeding things up leads to not just quantitative but a qualitative change in culture and society, and in our thought processes.

### **Jonah Raskin**

McLuhan is saying about television that it’s changing the world that we live in. It’s changing the way we think. It’s changing the way we feel.

### **Fred MacDonald**

When John Kennedy wrote that article in 1959, he was recognising the tremendous changes that were being effected in our culture, in our laws, in our society, in our politics, by the medium of television.

### **Paul Golding**

The scene where Martin Luther King is doing his amazing piece of oratory off-camera on the television glow, about packaging, about how the media has a script now. That was the essence of what the film was. It was about understanding how the media had begun to shape us, the way in which television related to the world. The way television dehumanised and packages.

### **Michael Arlen**

Television itself, as a domestic artefact, became larger and larger in people's lives.

### **Lance Strate**

Television completely transforms American life. One of the things we get from McLuhan is that there is an explanation for the generation gap. On both sides there was never such a gulf between one generation and another, between the parents and the children, between the Greatest Generation as we call them now, the World War II generation, and the baby-boomers. The difference is completely explainable by growing up with television. McLuhan puzzled people because you look at people watching television and they seem very passive and unengaged, but in fact there's a sense that by witnessing the events – not just hearing or reading about them but actually seeing it for ourselves – people are engaged and involved in what's going on. It's not in the sense that you get up and do something, but in watching it we become a part of it. That's why McLuhan described television as implosive rather than explosive. These are metaphors taken from nuclear weapons. The A-bomb exploded, the H-bomb imploded, before it exploded again. It's the idea that it sucks us into it, and we can't help but become emotionally involved in what's going on. Think about the Civil Rights movement. It was when we saw it, it just became intolerable, whereas if you just read about it you're detached and distanced. When we see the pained faces, let alone bodies and coffins, but the emotional response of people, that grabs and involved audiences as never before. It completely changed our sensibilities and what people are willing to tolerate, what they're looking for.

## The Corpse at the Accident

### Leonard Weinglass

Haskell captures the utter banality of the press and the journalists who bring us our news, talking about women, about how short their skirts are.

### *Medium Cool*

Gus

Did you know that for every man in Washington D.C. there are four and half women?

### Leonard Weinglass

Entertaining themselves at poolside, discussing the weather and being really oblivious to what's happening around them and what they are sent to record. The opening sequence of the film, at the cocktail party when the journalists are discussing their roles, is Haskell's brilliant commentary on the level of news-gathering which is spread throughout the film. The racism, the classism, the arrogance, the cynicism, all of that is the mix that we still live with in America which is so accurately portrayed in the film.

### Ian Christie

*Medium Cool* seems to me to be a real milestone in American trying to face up to the monster that is the media. Does the media cause things to happen? Does it objectively show what's happening? Does it delude people by showing them a false picture? All of these issues in people's minds come together in *Medium Cool*, so it's a great summing up of America's distrust of its own media.

### *Medium Cool* – [unidentified journalist]

Five cameraman have been killed. One guy in Germany was beat to death by a mob. Literally beat to death, for UPI. You know what the excuse was? The crowd thought he was taking pictures for the police.

### *Medium Cool* – journalist

He's the one who's right there with his eyes glued to the screen when the blood starts running. He's the one who said "Oh! Isn't it horrible? Let me see some more."

### Peter Bonerz

We were improvising all over the place in all sorts of scenes. One of the scenes was Bob and I relating with real news people. Print reporters and news photographers, newsreel guys.

*Medium Cool*

John

The dynamics are happening in society. We don't deal with the static things. We deal with the things that are happening. We deal with the violence. Who wants to see somebody sitting? Who wants to see somebody lying down? Who wants to see somebody talking peace, unless they're talking loud?

**Linn Ehrlich**

Haskell called me. He'd heard I had a space that might lend itself to what he wanted to do, and it was in a neighbourhood that was accessible. An old store front, twenty-five hundred square feet, relatively open. Haskell was very clever. He used just plain people, like Morrie Bleckman from Cinema Processors, which is where everyone took their film, whether you're a guy out with your Bolex from Columbia or the Art Institute or you were from the networks, this is where you took your film. Les Brownlee from the news channel. There were two gals here from *Paris-Match* covering the convention. Mickey Pallas from Pallas Photo. These were all professionals. He put us all in a room for the opening sequence, and we all just talked shop, with a few of us talking politics that he would feed. Haskell just went around the room filming all of us talking. None of us had a script. There may have been a couple of people who Haskell might have suggested one or two things to, but none of us were handed stuff. We were just a bunch of egocentric people at a cocktail party.

*Medium Cool*

Journalist

I've got a job to do and I'm interested in it. But the point that I resent very much is that wherever I go, I'm beat up.

**Terrence Gordon**

At the cocktail party at the beginning of the film, the producer says that people say, when they watch television, watch violence, "Yes, isn't it awful. Show me more."

*Medium Cool – outtakes*

Journalist 1

I said to you, I was part of the extension of my machine and I refused to get involved. Now, let me tell you why. What's the stadium on the lakefront?

Journalist 2

Soldier Field.

Journalist 1

I don't think it's been full since the Dempsey-Willard fight. I'm convinced that if you were to hold a public execution there tomorrow morning, you could sell tickets and fill it. This is what it boils down to when my editor sends me on a story. He wants pictures of the execution, whatever it is.



Journalist 2                    You can repeat Jack Johnson when he was the warden at the county jail. He made a public statement that said if we sold tickets for executions, we'd have a sell-out every night.

Journalist 1                    Right, I've been in his office.  
Eileen                            Is that true?

Journalist 2                    That is a true story, madam.  
Eileen                            I would never want to go see somebody get hanged. I think that's terrible. I would never want to see that.

Journalist 2                    As a reporter?  
Eileen                            As anybody.

Journalist 2                    Then you're not a reporter. If they sent me to photograph an execution I'd photograph it.  
Eileen                            But you say that the stadium would be filled up with people?

Journalist 2                    You're one person who wouldn't be there.  
Journalist 3                    It is the same in France. When Senator Kennedy was assassinated the pictures that came out in double page were the ones with his blood. That's what the editor wants and it's what the public wants to see.

### **Ian Christie**

It's a film that's angry with the media. Really at the heart of it is this anger at cameramen, news reporters, TV stations that are making up stories to fit their agendas and not reflecting the raw reality of the housing projects, of the marches, of the police brutality, of the chicanery of Chicago politics. It's an angry film, but at the same time it's a film that wants is to understand that we're part of this process because we're the spectators.

### ***Medium Cool***

Ruth                                Do you remember when we saw *Mondo Cane*?  
John                                We didn't see *Mondo Cane*.

### **Mark Goodall**

*Mondo Cane* is a unique documentary film. It was made principally by three people: Gualtiero Jacopetti, a journalist, Franco Proserpi, a scientist, a marine biologist in fact, and Paolo Cavara who was also a scientific filmmaker and made Italian TV films. The film is a newsreel, but – as opposed to the traditional idea of the newsreel as a short piece telling a particular story – what Jacopetti thought would be clever would be to create a compilation of newsreels, of different aspects of strange or curious phenomenon. That's the best way to think about it, as a global feature-length newsreel. This is nothing new for documentary. Documentary filmmakers have for years before travelled around the globe trying to find quirky things to film. One of the key differences with *Mondo Cane* is that the directors turn the film camera onto



### **William Rainbolt**

I do something and I do it well, and I don't really care what's in front of the camera. "My job is to get the shot." You can look at these juxtaposed images and think, "Yeah, that's just great photography." Doesn't really matter that one is Tiny Tim and one is a brutal execution. They're just great shots. The whole world is just watching. That's what John has been doing. What is the difference between just watching and having some other experience, whatever it would be: an emotional experience, a reverential, sacred experience, and experience meant to incite you to action. What are the possible experiences beyond just watching?

### **Neil Hickey**

A code of ethics in journalism is largely unwritten. Journalism schools teach ethics of course, while at the same time saying that pure objectivity is not a possibility. It can't be done. We understand that. The job is to be as fair as one can, to be as comprehensive as one can.

### **William Rainbolt**

The idea of ethics in journalism in 1963 and before that, specifically journalists shooting images, were not as apparent, or certainly weren't in the consciousness. They were not what journalists would sit around and be thinking and talking about. By the end of the 1960s into the Seventies, you couldn't go to a journalist convention without yet another panel about ethics and journalism.

### **Neil Hickey**

The job of the journalist is to keep the electorate as well informed as possible because you cannot have a republic without a well-informed electorate. The blood that flows through the republic is information. Information is what makes a republic possible. It makes it possible to cast an intelligent vote. The responsibility of the citizen in his republic is to know enough to cast an intelligent vote.

### **William Rainbolt**

Coming out of the Sixties, how do we possibly report on a society that many saw was imploding? How are we supposed to capture that, especially in television news which is so oriented to experience? What are we supposed to do with these experiences? Do we have a personal involvement, turning over the turtle or intervening in demonstrations we're seeing or stopping violence or actually choosing how to show that violence?

### **Peter Biskind**

One of the ways the film really meshes with the zeitgeist of the period is this fascination with objectivity and subjectivity. The whole premise of the film, starting with a cinematographer and talking about the responsibility of the viewer and the "professional" in terms of the material that he's shooting. I mean the whole opening scene with the crash, which they very calmly photograph and then, kind of

offhandedly, say, “I guess we should call an ambulance.” In the Sixties and Seventies, that was a huge issue. What is objectivity? What is subjectivity? How much responsibility do so-called professionals have for not only the things that they do and put in motion but the things that are going on around them which they affect? Obviously the film comes down on the side of: people do have responsibility for what goes on in front of their eyes.

### **William Rainbolt**

I think *Medium Cool* is saying a lot about us. What’s your moral position? In the opening scene there is a passerby, a pedestrian standing on the bridge over the accident. He’s just leaning on the bridge watching. So there are things in the film that are about us and what we’re doing at that time. That’s another aspect of the growth of visual culture and especially of television news. What’s your moral responsibility? Not that we can leave our homes and go save the world all the time, but what’s your moral responsibility to the image that you are looking at? The question can be reduced to: when do we cut? What do we show and when do we cut. It begins even before that with: what do we show? I’m going to show this. I’m going to intentionally film this and I’m not going to film what’s happening ten film away. Then, once I have filmed what’s in front of me here, where do I cut?

### **Chris Newman**

For me, the most moving scene in the entire film is the car wreck and the guy shooting the car wreck and not doing a thing about it. That kind of dehumanisation of the guys and their zeal to get ahead, to get the story. I once saw, for real a woman get bayoneted during a riot, and thirty camera crews just standing around shooting the woman, with the blood pumping out of her until the guy I was with – and it wasn’t even me, I can’t ascribe such great moral behaviour to myself – the reporter I was with put his camera down and said, “Isn’t anybody going to do anything?”

### **Richard Flacks**

It’s not a question of how a reporter would actually behave, though I believe they might, but more about what it symbolises about the relationship of the cameraman to the human beings who he is trying to represent and show on the screen with his camera. Seeing it, I would think, makes the viewer able to see television news in a different way, able to look at that whole process in a different way.

### **Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970**

Haskell Wexler

I try to use the cameraman as symbolic of a kind of professional. It could be a scientist working on some minute problem, the end result of which would be for bacterial warfare, but whose mind is totally on the microscope and the technical problem afoot.

Interviewer

You mean specialisation will distort truth and spontaneity.

Haskell Wexler

It shouldn't, but specialisation is a refuge, a way to avoid one's social responsibility, and a way to avoid the consequence of one's work. I imagine there are probably some very active German plumbers that ran gas into the chambers that killed the Jews. They had all the same rationalisations as our scientists have. All those complications are involved in being a professional and just doing your job.

### *Medium Cool*

Gus

It's the difference between someone who types something and the typewriter. The typewriter doesn't really care about what's being typed on it.

Eileen

But a typewriter's a machine and you're not a machine.

Gus

Er... Actually I'm kind of an elongation of a tape recorder.

### **Haskell Wexler**

As image-makers we have a responsibility because of the potential power of our presentation of images to not just deliver beautifully other people's lies, that we have a social responsibility. That's the struggle that I'm trying to suggest with that character in *Medium Cool*.

### **Todd Gitlin**

I think that Wexler is making a gesture toward undermining the notion that people can go through life being cool, in the sense of disengaged. I think he wants to show that the media are not simply bystanders and that the people who work in the media are kidding themselves, because nobody is simply reportorial, nobody is simply outside commenting coolly on the action. The notion that you can extricate yourself is simple a professional requirement that enables you to go on about your work, for example shooting the corpse at the accident, but morally it's not possible.

### **Paul Levinson**

If somebody is "cool" in an emotional sense, that usually means they are somewhat detached. There are many professional situations where we want people to be "cool," we want professionals. I would like my doctor or dentist to be "cool" when he's working on my teeth. A little detached. "Take it easy. It is my tooth. I'd rather not have half my jaw yanked out. Be cool. Take it easy." The question that *Medium Cool* brilliantly deals with is: do we want our reporters, our journalists, the people who tell us the story of our world, do we want them to be "cool" or "hot."

## Archive – Marshall McLuhan

“Cool” in the slang form has come to mean involved and deeply participative, deeply engaged. Everything that had formally meant by a “heated argument” is now called “cool” in slang. The idea that “cool” has reversed its meaning has some bearing on the fact that our culture has shifted a good deal of its stress into a demand that we be more committed, more involved in the situations in which we ordinarily work.

### *Medium Cool* out-take – [unidentified]

Now, see, that’s the point. That’s the part we were trying to bring before. Just because it’s happening doesn’t mean it has to go out and other people have to see it. This is the moral part of it. If I went home at night doing something like that, I would probably have felt like you did. I would think to myself, “Have I done a good job? What’s the matter with me? How do I do something like this?”

### *Medium Cool* out-take

John

I don’t try to make a value judgement, either with the film I shoot or with the things I say to my neighbours. Only my intimates, maybe. So I’m usually not in the business of trying to go out and propagandize. Which is then the question we deal with we talk about what I shoot. What do I do? I’m very selective. I select that which is dynamic. I select that which is, unfortunately, these days, usually bloody. I gotta eat. I gotta bring it up to Carl and say, “Here. This is what you sent me out to do and this is what you got, and that’s what was happening.” And he’s happy.

[?]

But at that point, he’s got to exercise discretion as to what to utilize that’s real and relevant to the issue you’ve been photographing. The news programmes, the drama programmes, exist to bring in sponsors’ messages to the public. And it’s all just a sham. We’re watching television to get the advertiser’s message. And we have this kind of economic censorship that dictates what’s going to be shown and what’s not.

John

Well, that means that we negate what ideals that we as individuals have, or we as semi- or somehow artists, by the fact that we work for a moneymaking proposition, a moneymaking outfit.

[?]

Someone can still make money and still be positive and still follow ideals. What if everybody refused to play that game? Then the sponsors would have to take what there was.

## Peter Kuttner

There's something about putting the camera between myself and the action that I found troubling. Though I aligned myself with *cinema-vérité* early on, and that's what attracted me to filmmaking, at those moments, those great moments in *cinema-vérité* filmmaking, I would have a long time before turning the camera off and set it down and held that person who is crying in my arms. I'm so glad that my friends have been able to keep their camera rolling and have those moments, because they're so moving in ways that people need to be moved. I was never really good at that.

## Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970

Interviewer One is sometimes faced with situations of such catastrophe in other people's lives that one simply stops. If you've got a camera to one eye and the other eye is shut, do you ever stop? Or does the nature of mechanism enable you to go on, framing that tragedy?

Haskell Wexler There's that danger. I think there's a human protection too. You cannot be completely sensitive to all the tragedies in the world, to all the tragedies you know of and that you come in contact with, otherwise you couldn't function. You have to decide whether you're going to do something about this or that problem, and function on that level.

Interviewer Have you chosen to be a director with some of this thought in the back of your mind?

Haskell Wexler Yes, I have.

Interviewer You couldn't go on being just a cameraman?

Haskell Wexler I'd be a cameraman on a good picture. I do whatever I can do well to further my beliefs.

## Haskell Wexler

I remember when I was shooting in Vietnam with Jane Fonda, I was shooting a pastoral scene of a guy out in a rice paddy, and while I was rolling he stepped on a landmine and he just went up in the air. Some Vietnamese were around me, two guys ran out and helped bring him in from the field, and I kept shooting that. They came to a doorway in this little house where they were going to try and do something about his wound. I could have put the camera down and helped them in that doorway, and for a fraction of a moment I had to decide whether I would do that or I would keep shooting because I had a good shot standing in front of the doorway and I could pan into the window and see them as they put him into the room. I choose to do the pan into the room, and I remember I couldn't see the end of that scene, as short as it was, because I was crying, and it was completely involuntary. I couldn't shoot anymore, and I felt at that moment the strongest division between being a voyeur and a shooter or being a human being, being a participant.

## The Living Room War

### Reuven Frank

When network television began, I had the sense that it was accepted by the public uncritically. A tiny public in 1949 which expanded every year as sets were bought. The anchormen became kind of heroes. But as the Vietnam War went on, culminating in 1968, we started showing Americans – nice, decent, hardworking people – what they didn't want to see.

### Alan Brinkley

It marks, as so many other things in the late Sixties did, a kind of break in our cultural life. A break away from the instinctive regard and respect for and trust in the media that I think most Americans had had up until at least 1965 and 1966, and the great cynicism and distrust and dislike of the media that have characterised American life for most of the time since then.

### Reuven Frank

You played the protests – after all, there were a lot of protests besides those in Chicago, they went on and on and on, the college campuses and all that stuff – against the battle footage that we had every night. This was not the America that the average good citizen knew. We came to Chicago to cover the National Democratic Convention, a very important part of the government system: picking the nominee of one of the two major parties for President of the United States. That was our purpose there. As journalists we had to cover everything that went on with it. Anti-war protest becomes a topic in and of itself. I stuck to only one principle which I've always held to in all the Convention coverage I've produced, and that is: every candidate is entitled to his nominating speech without interruption. But the minute the seconding speeches start, it's fair game. Anything I had that was of more value as news would go on.

### James Baughman

If you were a Humphrey Democrat, you were furious at the way that convention was televised.

### Reuven Frank

The Humphrey people were very upset because some of this stuff interrupted their seconding speeches, and a dozen years later I ran into one of their guys who said, "You cost us the election."

### James Baughman

You were seeing politically active people – both Democrats and Republicans – beginning to sense that TV news had a point of view that it didn't have earlier. Instead of accepting the facts, you attacked the messenger.



**Reuven Frank**

Blaming the messenger is a cliché, but the messenger is always blamed.

**James Baughman**

There was a broad consensus in the mid-1960s that TV news was a good thing, that the networks should be encouraged to do news and could be trusted to do news. That consensus began to break down in 1968. There was still a large number of Americans who trusted TV news and Walter Cronkite, but what you're beginning to see in the late 1960s, especially among politically active Americans, are second thoughts about TV news.

**Reuven Frank**

I think that from 1968 on, although more people watched television news as before, that kind of uncritical acceptance was over. They really didn't love us anymore.

**Dan Hallin**

Normally the Vietnam War was something that took place way out in the jungle, where access was very limited. It's a war that was often fought at a distance. Troops would be sent out. They would engage the Vietcong, then pull back and airstrikes were called in. The most combat you would see on your television screen would perhaps be some soldiers firing off into the distance, or you would see puffs of smoke where the airstrike was taking place in the far distance. You certainly would not see the effects on the ground, on people, on buildings.

**Michael Arlen**

Death was really way off-stage. Death was represented by statistics. Nobody showed a dead body. You weren't allowed to show dead bodies. If you wanted to both show the stuff at home and have the American viewer to look, and if you wanted the military and government to let you ride on their helicopters, you had to stay within certain commonsensical limits.

**James Baughman**

Vietnam was often called "the living room war," but several scholars have looked at the actual footage the networks ran, and up until the Tet Offensive in early 1968 you didn't see much blood or fighting. There were practical reasons for that. Much of the fighting occurred at night. It's also true – some network people said this at the time – that because the evening news was broadcast so early in the evening, and because there might be young people watching it, that showing graphic footage of the war would be off-putting and distasteful. I would submit that if you looked at *Life* magazine in the last years of World War II, that's a much more graphic portrayal of war than what you saw on the networks before 1968.

### **Neil Hickey**

The Pentagon didn't like to see bodies returning to the United States. They put a ban on film of returning bodies coming back to Dover Air Force Base.

### **Michael Arlen**

The war was portrayed by television cameras in a fairly antiseptic way. Television was not looking for trouble. You had the field officers and you had the correspondents who knew the score. The Generals were really very averse to having the score played back with any kind of nuance, and the editors comparably. The editors wanted fairly straightforward footage. If you had some distant combat activity that was good. You especially wanted something that would show American troops doing well. But you were not looking for stories.

### **Neil Hickey**

Television in Vietnam in the 1960s was not the best medium to understand what was going on. You needed to read the best newspapers and the best journals to learn what the issues were. You had to know a bit of Vietnamese history, a bit about the Chinese relations to the Vietnamese and the French occupation. Most of the correspondents there were quite young. As far as the correspondents went, this was a young man's war because they had to go out everyday and risk their lives and be with the soldiers and they got shot at in the same way they soldiers were shot at, supposedly explaining to the folks back home what this war was about. No such thing. The correspondents always told me that if we miss a firefight at NBC and ABC got it, we get what's called a "rocket" from New York, from the producers back there saying, "Why did they have that battle and we didn't?"

Walter Cronkite said that everyone should read a good newspaper. He was the face of television news for a good long time after the 1960s. That's what he said: read a good newspaper, because you're not going to get the whole story from television. Television is a metaphoric medium, a symbolic medium. You will get bits and pieces of the story and you will get impressions, but you won't get context. That was the way in Vietnam. My thesis when I covered Vietnam was that it was not a very good television story because what was covered was firefights and shooting in the rainforests. But that wasn't important. It was regrettable but not significant in the long run. What was really important was what was going on in Saigon and Hanoi between the generals and the diplomats.

### **Dan Hallin**

Television was actually more timid about challenging public opinion, either by showing disturbing images or even, more so, by covering challenging perspectives on the war, challenging points of view and reporting on things like war crimes by American troops or drug use by American troops. These were things you could read about the newspaper long before you could see them on television. Television was always very wary about getting caught on the wrong side of public opinion, more so

than newspapers. The reality is that television coverage, most of the time throughout most of the war, was not particularly disturbing to public opinion. It was not particularly challenging of dominant assumption about war in general, or about the war. To some extent you can make the argument that especially in the early days, public opinion about the Vietnam War changed despite the way it was represented by television and despite the ways television covered up the most disturbing aspects of it or interpreted it within a traditional World War II framework. “Another big victory here,” “We’re going to win this thing in the end” and “Troops have high morale.” That’s what the coverage was like in the early days. I think people turned against the war in part because it just dragged on. By 1968 the divisions over the war had grown to the point that journalists were starting to think of this story differently. They were starting to think of it not as World War II, we all have to be behind our President and troops. They were thinking of it as a political controversy in which they had a responsibility to report both sides and be aggressive in questioning official statements.

### **Neil Hickey**

You can say that television had a huge influence in bringing the Vietnam War to an end. Not only did Walter Cronkite go over there in 1968 and come back and go on his own programme and declare that the war was unwinnable, that we were bogged down in a quagmire and there was no way out and we had simply walk away from it. As Johnson said, “If I’ve lost Walter Cronkite, I’ve lost the public.”

### **Archive – Walter Cronkite**

To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past. To suggest we are on the edge of defeat is to yield to unreasonable pessimism. To say that we are mired in stalemate seems to only realistic, if unsatisfactory conclusion.

### **Dan Hallin**

For the two month period of Tet, the war just becomes much more dramatic across every dimension. You see more combat and more casualties. You see more destruction. The destruction is going on where the journalists are. We see it, and we also see the journalists react to it. During Tet you also saw American troops on a day-to-day basis in a really hard fight. That’s crucial to why it looked different on television. It wasn’t just an occasional journalist who would go out with the troops, it was all of the journalists all of the time with the fighting was going on around them.

### **James Baughman**

You had the phenomenon of a crew in Saigon and the fighting taking place in Saigon, where it hadn’t occurred in three years. Of course you’re going to be able to capture that, as opposed to fighting that prior to January 1968 was occurring in the

countryside, where you had to carry very heavy equipment around, literally through the jungle, covering the fighting. That's not to say some fighting wasn't covered. There are some famous reports – one by Morley Safer about Cam Ne – but they weren't representative of what was televised.

### **Dan Hallin**

If there was any period when it was actually true that people saw the horror of war night after night on their television screens, it was during this brief period of Tet, starting near the end of January 1968. You have very intensive daily coverage with a lot more images of combat and graphic images than in any other period of the war. There were a few rare times when you saw really bloody, gory images covering the Vietnam War, and one of the most important was during the Tet Offensive when a South Vietnamese officer executed a Viet Cong prisoner, and it was caught on camera. It was caught by a television cameraman for NBC, and by a still photographer. Those images were seen in many papers. They were seen on television. That was certainly the bloodiest image shown during the Vietnam War, and it stands along with the picture of the Buddhist monk burning himself in 1963. Another is the picture of the little girl hit by napalm in 1972. Seeing a killing on-camera was not a normal part of the Vietnam War. It's a rare event. Normally they cut that kind of thing out because they were worried it would offend viewers and advertisers. I think you can say that this is one place where Tet was a catalyst, that in the context of this unprecedented offensive coming as it did when there was so much concern about the Vietnam War, they made a different choice than they had made in other cases.

### **Paul Golding**

There had been some television coverage of the Korean War. It was in no way like the coverage of the Vietnamese War. It was in no way as painful and as constant a drumbeat. That was the life that we were all living back then.

### ***Medium Cool***

Lester Brownlee

There's some place where it's safe. They are away from it. They deplore it but they deplore like all good people. All good people deplore problems at a distance.

### **Terrence Gordon**

In the global village there is no more distance. Everything is right in our face through the medium of television, so the whole world is watching, but also involved because of the form of the medium itself.

### **Archive – TV news**

Journalist

Had you ever expected to experience this kind of street fighting in Vietnam?

Soldier

No I didn't, and this is my first crack at street fighting. I think it's the first time the Marine Corps has been street fighting since Seoul in 1950.

**Eric McLuhan**

I think what really hit Vietnam was colour TV.

**Archive – TV news anchor**

Contact. The first sniper shots ricochet around the thick walls of the building, taking the first casualties of the first squad.

**Ian Christie**

That question of what do we do as spectators as we see something like the Vietnam War or a street demonstration on television was really beginning to preoccupy people a lot in the late Sixties. What does it mean to see all this stuff on television? How does it change our attitude to a distant war? What if the war is happening on the streets of our own city?

**Eric McLuhan**

It was a war in which, via the imagery, involved people in the front lines. The person at home was also on the front line, simultaneously. It doesn't matter what the ideas or ideology or politics of it is, you're there. It's the first foreign war fought right here, in my living room.

**Michael Arlen**

The television was broadcasting in your house, and it was broadcasting what could be called news of a war that citizens were supposed to support, and did support. The people reporting on it also supported it. When the mood switched and shifted, it was the same thing all over again. Now you had correspondents who for five years had reported a war without irony now reported it with irony now reported it with irony, as if everybody understood this was not such a good thing. But they hadn't been doing that before. The audience had shifted. By "living room war" I meant that for the first time, the images of something seemingly important to the country were now being domesticated, part of a shared family or household experience.

**Jonah Raskin**

You don't have to leave your home in order to be transported to the place. The place is transported right to where you're having dinner.

### **James Baughman**

Delivering news like that was something people didn't want to hear. In 1968 you didn't have alternative sources of news that could tell you what you wanted to hear, so what you begin to see bubbling here is a mostly conservative resentment of the messenger.

### **Fred MacDonald**

Television is bringing all of this death and morbidity into our living rooms, into the most personal spaces, into our bedrooms in some cases, if you have a TV in the bedroom. You're watching bodies come home in caskets from Vietnam. You're watching guys who didn't die but are maimed for the rest of their lives.

### **Archive – Marshall McLuhan**

Question                      You said that bad news is indispensable to newspapers. Is the same thing true for television?

Marshall McLuhan            Well, it's like saying that is TV is a cool medium, then you can't use it for hot jobs. The Vietnam War is a hot war and it won't go on TV. It's the first hot shooting war shown on a cool medium. A cool medium involves the whole audience so deeply they find war unbearable. Show the same war on movies, on press photography and so on, people won't feel too badly about it. But on TV they really feel it. They're involved, for the first time.

### **Paul Levinson**

Radio during World War Two did nothing but increase support for the war. It has to go with the "cool" quality of television. What television did was present images which cried out for images to complete in their understanding. If they were coming to it with an understanding of, "We've got to support our troops, we've got to be there and help out," that actually stirred up support for the war. If it was watched by people who already didn't like the war, it stirred up their opposition to the war.

### **Eric McLuhan**

Since TV, we have not won a war. You cannot win a war under those conditions. You can participate in it or get out of it, but there's no winning. You turn them up, you turn them down, but you can't win.

## “Look out Haskell, it’s real!”

### Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970

- Interviewer      What are you trying to say about violence in this film?  
                             What is your message?
- Haskell Wexler      Number one, I’m against it. I don’t think it accomplishes anything for any side. Number two, I think that if you set on a pattern or direction of violence, no matter how well intentioned the moral idea, whether it’s violence for defence or to protect oneself, violence to maintain a system no matter what. If you set on that course, even if you wish to stop it, it goes beyond a point and you can’t stop violence.
- Interviewer      Do you think it’s getting worse in the United States?
- Haskell Wexler      No question about it. There’s a TV series in America called *Mission Impossible*. In this series is a group of men who do horrible things. They poison the bad guys, they hide bugging and surveillance instruments, they impersonate wives and husbands, they blow up anything and everything through various ingenious technological devices, and so forth. But they are our guys. Once you’ve seen the show once, you know that these people can do anything – however horrible – because they represent our teams, our guys. This is a very popular show, and we all accept it. It’s a sort of comic strip-type mentality. I think that at least on the surface that mentality is permeating our structure.

### Verna Bloom

It was so unreal to be sitting down in the street in a major city in the United States of America, and having these tanks come at you. Also the juxtaposition of the real stuff that was going on while I was playing a part. It was just such an odd feeling knowing that the character that I was portraying wasn’t me, when I talked to the cops it wasn’t me. So I was playing a part in a make-believe story, in a real situation.

### Leonard Weinglass

The National Guard was rehearsed in a fighting mode, and that’s when they used in the streets of Chicago, even when there was no attack, there was no offensive behaviour, there was no violence directed at them. They still reacted as they were trained to react. And the film juxtaposed those two episodes: the National Guard getting ready for violence and the demonstrators being peaceful, and then projected it into the reality of what happened on the streets of Chicago.

### **Tom Hayden**

It was becoming a pattern, this idea of an incident setting off a round of demonstrations in the streets. Macing, clubbing, the police attacking, the demonstrators retreating, picking up teargas canisters, throwing them back. People learning how to live with teargas, how to inhale teargas. We had our own Red Cross set up with tents and medical teams. So we went in as if it was a low-intensity war because we had our own medical units. It was one sided. We knew we didn't have the equipment and the armour.

### **Paul Golding**

When Haskell had shot the sequence at Fort Ripley, the National Guard training, they were using fake tear gas. Those canisters were spraying out a white powder and Haskell was moving right in among people and going in for close-ups. You can see Bob Forster in for a close-up without tear-gas protection because it's just talcum powder. Haskell was standing shooting a line of National Guardsmen and one of them actually fired his teargas canister at Haskell and the crew as part of the frustration of "Back off guys!"

### **Jonathan Haze**

There was a bridge, and the National Guard had a roadblock up on the bridge. They were letting a few people in at a time. Verna, in her yellow dress, got through. We were going to follow her through and film her. We were stopped by the National Guard. They said, "You can't go through." We said, "We're going through anyway," and they let Haskell have it with this teargas. At that point I said, "Haskell, let's get out of here, it's real." Apparently they re-looped that line later.

### ***Medium Cool***

"Look out Haskell, it's real!"

### **Haskell Wexler**

It was real. I was tear-gassed with Jonathan Haze, my producer and friend. When you think about tear-gas you think it makes you cry, makes you uncomfortable. It makes you think you're going to die because you can't breathe and your skin burns.

### **Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970**

Interviewer	There's one bit when somebody shouts your name and says the gas is real. What was that?
Haskell Wexler	That's when I was teargassed, a big blast of what I found out recently was a British type of teargas which was shot at me by the National Guard. We had been around riot training a few months previously, and I think my assistant thought we were all invincible because the gas at that time was fake.



Interviewer  
Haskell Wexler

What effect does the gas have on you?  
The first thing is that you can't breathe. You feel you're going to die. Usually you hear about teargas and it sounds like, "Well, so you cry a little, and you deserve to cry because you're a rioter and your disreputable." But the most terrifying thing about it is that you feel that you can't breathe. You're gasping. The other thing is that it burns anywhere you have exposed skin. I had more exposed skin then than I do now. But it burns, like a very severe sunburn.

**Haskell Wexler**

I have to tell you that the line, "Look out Haskell, it's real!" was done afterwards. And I put it in because we were not shooting sound. But it was my intention and it was on my mind. I mean, if someone had read my mind at the moment I was shooting and the fucking tear-gas was coming at me in slow-motion, something in me said those very words.

**Paul Golding**

It made a very important point, a nice commentary about that wonderful dichotomy that the film sits on, that razor edge of what's real and what's not real. What's fiction and what's the context of that fiction and how far does that context go. All those issues that the film tried to raise were nicely crystalised a little bit for that one line, so of course we used it, even though it was fake.

**Haskell Wexler**

When you're looking through the camera, in a sense you're not there. You are looking at the movie you're trying to make, and when the tear-gas came at me it was a strong enough jab from the so-called "real" world to remind me that the ground glass lens is no barrier to your lungs, your eyes, your face.

## The Arrangement with Warren

### Neil Hickey

There were teams of a soundman, a camera man and a correspondent who would roam the floor, listening to instructions from the producer in the control room saying, “Go to the Illinois delegation, there’s something happening over there,” or “You really should talk to Congressman so-and-so in the Missouri delegation.” So they would scurry about the floor looking for that person.

### Archive – convention floor, Chicago 1968

Donald Peterson                      Most delegates to this convention do not know that thousands of young people are being beaten in the streets of Chicago, and for that reason I request the suspension of the rules to relocate the convention in another city...

Carl Albert                              Wisconsin is not recognized for that purpose!

### Archive – convention floor, Chicago 1968

Unidentified                              There seems to be some kind of battle going on over there.  
Unidentified                              Yes, directly under our booth here. They’re carrying a man out bodily by the legs and the arms. Apparently they see somebody from the New York delegation and these others are saying that he is delegate.

Unidentified                              They knew exactly who I was because John Burns, the chairman of the Democratic State Committee here and head of our delegation, at the top of his voice identified me and said, “Leave this man alone.” They knew I had credentials. They were trying to take them away from me, so that when I was taken outside I could be accused of being on the floor without credentials. The chief of detectives were very solicitous. He did not expect me to have my credentials because he was certain that his man had removed them from me, and when I took out the credentials and then it to them – torn as they were, because they had ripped this metal plastic plate off my neck, I had held onto it but they had torn the nylon cord – I think he was the most surprised man in all of Chicago.

### Haskell Wexler

We wanted to shoot in the Convention Hall. We had phoney credentials but they didn’t work. I ran into Warren Beatty, I said “Warren, we can’t get in.” He said “I’ll get you in the Convention Hall but you have to do some shots of me. I have some ideas for a feature film.” And so Warren got us credentials.

### **Michael Margulies**

The terms were we would take two rolls of film in, one roll would be for Haskell, and one roll would be for Warren for his movie in the future. That was the day that Haskell got gassed and he was not up to it, so he gave me instructions and the camera. I went to the Convention Center and met Warren. And it was perfect, just exactly what he wanted. We unloaded the camera and gave him the film, and then I filmed in the Convention: the Speaker and the various scenes in there that are in the movie.

### **Reuven Frank**

Each of the network news organisations needed twelve floor credentials. Four for the reporters, four for the cameramen, four for the soundmen. A man named Leonard Wrench, one of the people who ran the Convention, showed up to tell us how many passes we would get, and each network got two passes. This was another attempt to restrict the coverage by restricting access.

### **Neil Hickey**

You can't have all two thousand reporters on the floor at the same time, so you line up and you get a badge which allows you to go onto the floor for twenty minutes or thereabouts. That's not insidious. That's necessary thing to bring a little touch of order to the convention floor, which is disorderly enough in the circumstances.

### **Robert Forster**

I do remember Haskell coming to me, rushed, at a certain point because he'd been trying and trying to get onto the floor to shoot some footage to tie me in as a journalist. There was a barrier and you had to have credentials to get past them. And at a certain point he said "We got them! We got them!" Mike Margulies put film in my camera and gave me an f-stop, and he said, "Get the best pictures you can." We had credentials for a very short window of time. We shot stuff as fast as we could shoot and load. We each had cameras. Me, looking like the journalist I was supposed to be, and him looking like the journalist who swung over and shot another journalist for who knows what reason. The moments on the floor were separate from those moments all around the Convention. We'd been hanging around the building in places where they wouldn't kick us out of and shot all kinds of things, including me listening to my page boy and going to the phone and talking and writing notes, you name it. Things that Haskell hoped would have a value in the final product. A cut of this, a tiny piece of that, a bridge moment.

### ***Medium Cool* out-take**

John

OK. Yeah, I'll be right up.

## Hitting Them Where They Live

### Ian Christie

It's also a film that I think influenced a lot of fiction filmmakers. You can see that a lot of the new American cinema that's beginning to emerge at this time, at the end of the Sixties, is drawing on the new fluid camerawork and the new slippage between fiction and documentary which Wexler is a part of. Look at Scorsese for instance. Scorsese's films are, in many ways, shot like documentaries, even though they are about fictional characters. He is equally influenced by Cassavetes and by *cinéma-vérité*, two of the key influences on Wexler. So at this point what's exciting about American cinema is all flowing in the same direction, and *Medium Cool* stands as one of the great summings-up of this new dynamic.

### Leonard Weinglass

*Medium Cool* is probably the most accurate portrayal of the American scene in 1968, on a political, social, cultural, racial level.

### Todd Gitlin

There were very few films until maybe 1968 – I can think of maybe three – which in their spirit touched on some of what we were feeling in the movement. *Dr. Strangelove* did in a satirical way, and it was extremely important in relaying the sense of the craziness of conventional thinking about the bomb. In a funny way *Blow Up* expressed some of the sense of disbelief and the unreality of the life we were living. But more than either of these, *Bonnie and Clyde* expressed the tragic exuberance of violence and the sense of being fated for a collision with authority, which was doomed and at the same time romantic.

### John Simon

There is a huge difference between political films that invent and elaborate fiction and a film that takes politics as they were and actually did happen, and incorporates that in what is in large part a fiction film. So these are real politics versus imaginary politics. This is real history versus a fiction of history, and as such it has a stature, a uniqueness, a dignity that not many films can match.

### Todd Gitlin

I respect the film for making an effort, at this convulsive time, when most of Hollywood is still Hollywood, and television is a bad joke, it barely rises to the level of the banal, and the country is reeling, and most of the film culture is rolling along as if nothing is happening, and there Wexler stands with his independent production saying, "Wait a minute. America is unravelling in some sense, and the media are at the core of this and the collision between authority and young anti-authority is seemingly momentous and one should stare at this and try to take it seriously."

### **Jay Cocks**

It's a movie that takes a very big bite out of a very important time in history and, I think, reflects it admirably in a way that probably no other movie at that time quite does. I think that you can make a very strong case for movies like *The Wild Bunch* reflecting the time in which it was made, but I think in a much more oblique way.

### **Richard Schickel**

Arthur Penn, when he directed the concluding massacre of *Bonnie and Clyde*, with the excesses of firepower and bodies being ripping and bounced by bullets, was utterly self-consciously talking about Vietnam. He knew he was doing that.

### **Jay Cocks**

Haskell's movie is way out front, without apology. He just wants to get you by the throat and never lets go.

### **Richard Schickel**

*Medium Cool* was a movie in which the protagonists were essentially victims of a cruel and unfeeling establishment.

### **Michael Renov**

There's very often a balancing act that goes on for filmmakers who have political interests. They have a social milieu that's important for them. They set their characters into the middle of some kind of social framework. But in the case of the summer of '68 and the Democratic National Convention on the streets of Chicago, here was something happening that had world-historical importance. The fact that there was a story set in that time, in that space, allowing the characters to enter into that real social space, in which conflict is happening everywhere, in which a "police riot" was occurring, Haskell's intuition was to let the characters become less important than what would have previously been considered the background. What I think is that the background becomes the foreground, and the foreground becomes the background.

What often happens, if history is important, especially historical conflict in these moments, if it's brought into the fiction, it tends to be swallowed up and contained by the fiction. It has to be because it knows no bounds. I talk about the difference between the centrifugal force of history, which is constantly moving out, and the centripetal force of narrative, which has to draw everything back. What normally happens in this contestation between the centrifugal and centripetal is that history has to be contained and put inside this narrative space, but what happens in *Medium Cool* is exactly the opposite. The incorporation of history fails, and it explodes out of the screen and into the social sphere.

### **Richard Flacks**

It came out in a moment when there was a spate of films that were capturing or attempting to capture, and in some way shaped, the sensibility of the “revolutionary” young. I get here, Santa Barbara, in the fall of '69. This is a bubbling student community which had not seen any real political activism until earlier that year. By the time I get here there's quite a sense of unrest. There was a huge social explosion in January/February 1970. The Bank of America was burned, a tremendous amount of police confrontation, a student was killed, hundreds of students went to jail later in that 69/70 year. It was in the fall that all these films start to show. They had a similar arc to them, if you think about it, which is a very disturbing arc. There's this uprising. The people do rise up, but they are crushed, and death is the final outcome.

### **Todd Gitlin**

You get a sense in *Medium Cool* that the world is no longer stable. It's no longer comprehensible. It's careening from one mystery to another and that the people who are at work in the world don't really know what they're caught in. They're caught in some sort of vortex. The sense of confusion and dismay is comparable – I don't want to say that our risk was anything like this – but the degree of befuddlement and disorientation is comparable to what many people have described in wartime. There's a lot of thrashing around in that film which is, I think, at its best interesting and does convey the sense that many people felt at the time, that we had cut loose. I think it was true not just of our side, but also the police and the government that we had cut loose from normal expectations and beliefs and were in some new territory that hadn't been mapped. Part of what was crazy was that you didn't really know outcomes. After the fact many things evident, but at the time we were not only physically but metaphysically running around in teargas, with tears running around our eyes, blundering around, looking for bearings and pretending at times that we knew what we were doing.

### **Michael Renov**

What I think is so interesting about the apocalyptic dimensions of *Medium Cool* is that it's not apocalyptic only at the narrative level. Sure, one of our main characters seems to have died by the end, but that's a lot less important. The apocalypse is really about, “My God, what has America become?”

### **Richard Flacks**

If you were a student here, feeling a lot of confrontation with the draft, the police, and then these films hit you, one after the other, over again with this impact of, “Things are falling apart. The naked reality of authority is brutal, vicious and so forth.” In retrospect, the fact that these filmmakers who were empathetic to the movement couldn't think of an ending other than blowing people away, is real disturbing if you think about it.

### **William Rainbolt**

What happened in Chicago in August 1968 at the Democratic National Convention, it's important for that to be documented as part of our history of the Sixties, as part of our political history, as part of our culture, as part of the war that we were in. So we need documentation of all these kinds of themes in a variety of ways. We're going to look at excerpts from this film called *Medium Cool*. There's a fictional story, but we're going to look at this film only as a historical primary source of what was happening on the floor of the Convention, so you can see for yourself how Daley and his thugs were, and what happened in Grant Park and on the side streets. I want us to look only at those things. You could show a history class and never refer to the fictional characters.

### **Michael Renov**

I looked at *Medium Cool* and said, "History against fiction. History wins." Very rare. There are plenty of times when there are history and fiction contesting with one another, but they are contained. One example is *Breathless*. When Godard was shooting in the streets of Paris in the summer of 1959, it so happened that Eisenhower was arriving in Paris to meet with de Gaulle. There's a sequence which shows the cordon of police on motorcycles, really in anticipation of the limo that contains Eisenhower. It's very understated in the film, but if you think about it, Eisenhower – then President of the United States – had also been the liberator of France, so for him to come back and meet up with de Gaulle had real historical and social implications. Since what's going on in the drama of *Breathless* – you've got Jean Seberg on the one hand, an American in Paris, and then you've got the Belmondo character, who is somehow under the sway and influence of Hollywood representations like Bogart – so you've got Franco-American relations that are writ large on the streets. You're seeing the meeting of the minds of the two heads of state, and then in the bedroom you've got the Frenchman and the American. The historical reference is really embedded quite deeply into the film. You have to know what it is you're looking at. The film doesn't tell you.

In the second example, *Gone with the Wind*, it's not really history in the sense of it being live. Of course, it was shot to simulate the Civil War. But this was the Selznick touch, which was to have the end of the first half with Scarlett O'Hara and her small drama, but then a crane shot which lifts up to show this panorama of fallen soldiers and this almost horizon full of the dead and wounded. There's a sense that what's happening with the characters – Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara – seems, at least for a moment, to be minimised in relationship to the world historical. But there it's hardly a contest. It's really all about the characters.

The final example – and I think it's an extraordinary one – is a film by Satyajit Ray called *The Adversary*. It was made in about 1970. Satyajit Ray was not someone given to overt politics very much, and in fact was criticised in the late 1960s and early 1970s because he rarely turned his attention to what was happening in contemporary politics. But in this case he's got a young man and a young woman on the roof of a large building, overlooking what turns out to be the largest public demonstration in

the history of India up until that time. You have at least fifty or a hundred thousand people in the background, and then you've got something happening between the young man and the young woman. It's very low-key, very subtle by comparison. But back to the idea of background and foreground: there's no question that what remains in the foreground is the relationship.

Compare that to *Medium Cool*, where what you have is the Verna Bloom character who is looking for her son, who is lost and has gone astray. She's out there, going through the streets in search of him, but what she sees, of course, are the cordons of the military and various demonstrators and news trucks. We see her making her way through the streets, and as this twenty-minute sequence unfolds, she becomes less and less important, and less and less foregrounded. Instead she becomes almost the dot of yellow against the backdrop which seems completely incongruous. These are the streets of Chicago, at the time the second-largest city in the United States. And yet we see tanks, we see military forces, we see the National Guard, we see tens of thousands of students and other kinds of protesters in the streets, and they're right up against one another. Violence is about to break out, and then does break out. Tear gas, gun shots, and in light of that, it seems that Wexler has given up the need to maintain the primary focus on the story, on the narrative, which is mother looking for lost son. The conflict that's occurring takes precedence and moves to the foreground, and that's remarkable.

### **Haskell Wexler**

*Medium Cool* differs from *Easy Rider* in that it hit them where they lived. They could stand the hair, the beards, the revolution, the new, the special, the young, but when you talk about FBI, corporate control, about militarism, about an unresponsive political system, then you're hitting them where they live, and that's different.

### ***Medium Cool***

John

People rarely say the real reasons for things. Big corporations never do. It's just politics. Plain bureaucratic politics.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Long hair, for example. When our crew, when our people in Chicago went out to work, went to a restaurant in Chicago, they wouldn't serve long hair. Even things like tennis shoes and blue jeans or beards kept up from being served in restaurants in Chicago in 1968. And then within two years afterwards you turn on network television and you'll see the commentators with long hair, you'll see commercials that speak of the revolutionary new pantyhose. Revolution became a word to sell things, so the system co-opted many of the cultural things but it was not able to stomach easily some of the more deeply political and economic challenges that *Medium Cool* threw up.



### **Richard Schickel**

It seemed to them, I think, for its moment a kind of radical film and a film that was certainly stylistically not a studio film at that time. As always with studios, when a film is unconventional, it makes them nervous.

### **Haskell Wexler**

I sat in a screening room with representatives of Paramount. The first thing they said is, "That naked scene's gotta go. That guy, he's running around with his yosh jumping up and down." They objected seriously to male frontal nudity. I had a wide-angle lens and we just ran around the room. With that lighting and the lens you don't see any genital details. But it was sufficiently visible to these guys who used many street words to describe genitals and screwing and women and tits and ass, and all that, amongst their conversation. But I took some of the wind out of their sails when I said I could change that so I could get a better rating. Incidentally, all this time Paramount didn't say a word in my defence.

### **Jay Cocks**

I read that there was some studio nervousness about this movie. The fact that they were nervous about it intrigued me because at that time, generally, anything the studio was nervous about turned out to be something of exceptional interest, whether it was *The Wild Bunch* or *Medium Cool*, you could be sure that if the studio had sweaty pits, you were going to see a good movie.

### **Haskell Wexler**

The film almost didn't come out. It was volatile in certain ways that Paramount which was part of Gulf and Western Corporation didn't know how to deal with. Ultimately Paramount was forced to comply with the agreement they had with me, but they did it only by the letter of the law. They used all the power of the system to keep the film from coming out. For example, we had hundreds of people in the park. They said "You have to have release forms from the people in the park." I went to Justice Goldberg and engaged him to see the film. Fifteen hundred dollars it cost me. He saw the film with me alone in a screening room in New York to get his opinion whether it was necessary for me to get releases from all the people in the park. He said, "Well this is a very interesting film. I don't think I've seen a film like this. You don't need to have releases from the people in the park." I said, "Will you write it down and send it to Paramount right away for my fifteen hundred bucks?" He said, "Yes, of course." I said, "And explain to me what it's going to say?" He said, "Well, with public people doing public things in public places like that, you do not require a release."

### **Archive – Haskell Wexler, 1970**

Interviewer                      How far do think that watching *Medium Cool* is going to make people feel more socially responsible or change their lives in any way?

Haskell Wexler

Well, at one time Paramount was reconsidering distributing it, and I was told by their lawyers that when people saw that film they would come out and riot, and put the executives of Paramount in jail. I was very flattered by that, but I don't think it's very likely.

### **Paul Golding**

Paramount wasn't Paramount. Paramount was the Gulf + Western Corporation which had a lot of irons, and Paramount was one of them. But there were a lot of irons in a lot of fires, and whatever Paramount Pictures, the actual people who had some degree of artistic concept of what a picture should be and how to sell a picture, the stuff that you'd expect the studio executives to know, that was just part of the corporate umbrella.

### **Haskell Wexler**

Later more things unfolded. There was a young Canadian guy who had seen the film and worked for the same insurance company branch in Canada. He contacted me a few weeks after the Arthur Goldberg thing and said that Paramount has asked the insurance company to make that objection. The insurance company itself did not volunteer that objection. So after overcoming that they said, "That may be the case, but the language in the film is terrible. We can't have 'Fuck the draft' and 'Pigs eat shit.'" I forget all the phrases that you hear thrown in. Many of them of course were done in post because we were shooting with a naked camera. So they said, "The hippies and these anti-war people provoked the cops. You have a line in there where the cops say 'Let's get the fuckers.' The hippies, as they called them, the anti-war protestors, did something to provoke the cops. You must have some of that material. You shot that material. You shot that stuff, and how come you didn't you put that in the film. It has to be more balanced." So I said, "I didn't shoot that. I didn't hear it." They said, "You have to balance it." So then came a correspondence in trading language. I looked through the soundtrack of one of my documentaries, and I had a black guy – not on film, but on the soundtrack – saying "Up against the wall motherfucker." So I said, "OK. I will trade you one 'Up against the wall motherfucker' two 'Pigs eat shit.'" So we have this back-and-forth dialogue which was totally meaningless.

### **Richard Schickel**

I think he was assuming more of an establishment conspiracy around this movie than there probably was. My suspicion is that the studio was simply puzzled by the film, puzzled commercially. I have no idea what its executives thought about it politically. They weren't too much in tune with it, but a studio's a studio. They'll release anything if they think they can make a dollar or two on it.

### **Irwin Yablans**

My job at Paramount was western sales manager. I was pretty much responsible for all theatrical distribution in the United States west of Chicago. As such, because I lived and work in Los Angeles, in Hollywood, my contact with filmmakers was a bit unusual because I was called upon many times to give an opinion on the commercial prospects of what pictures might gross in the United States. I was asked my opinion on what I thought *Medium Cool* would do as a potential box-office release, and I told them I thought that as much as I thought it was a wonderful movie, it would be problematic in terms of a real success at the box-office.

### **Bernard Dick**

In 1969 the abominable movie version of the great Lerner and Loewe musical *Paint Your Wagon* was done. A great deal of Paramount advertising money went into the promotion of *Paint Your Wagon* which was an absolute bomb. Another film given a very, very big advertising budget was *True Grit* with John Wayne. When you have those two films, one a bomb, going into release, you are not going to spend a great deal of advertising money on a movie like *Medium Cool*.

### **Irwin Yablans**

The truth of the matter is that the picture launched with all best intentions and as far as I can remember we gave it really good try. But it was a hard picture to sell. You had no stars, you had a director no one had heard of. You had to sell it on word of mouth. It was the only way a film like that could catch on. The way was sold films like that in those days was to open and showcase it in cities like Los Angeles, New York and perhaps Chicago in limited theatres, sometimes in only one theatre, and get a buzz going, word of mouth, hoping to garner critical praise.

### **Peter Bart**

The marketing and distribution people at Paramount at that epoch were really prosaic, pedestrian people. They didn't know how to handle things like *Medium Cool*. I honestly think that our company was completely buffaloed. They didn't know how to sell it.

### **Irwin Yablans**

Distribution, the sales people, which euphemistically used to be represented by the term "New York," ran the company. The power was not in Hollywood. The power was in New York, controlled usually by a bunch of sales types leftover from another era who arrogantly considered themselves enlightened because they dealt with real money and real business and banking, whereas the people out in "the coast" dealt in dreams and fairy tales. As a result, a lot of people controlled Hollywood, the movie business, who had no movie experience.

**Peter Bart**

They would see a picture like *Medium Cool* and say, “Oh my God! What do you do with this picture?” So I can understand why Haskell, who is a wonderful man but a very ideological person, that he would feel there was a political plot in suppressing this picture.

**Irwin Yablans**

It never stood chance when you consider that to make money in those days we were making Westerns with John Wayne. When you took three hundred prints and rolled them out across the country in Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin, and small cities, particularly in a much less sophisticated population that we have today, it was very hard to reach an audience beyond an intelligentsia that could see the film for what it was.

**Haskell Wexler**

Even though it was very, very well reviewed, the audience was very small. Paramount felt that their corporate structure was threatened by the negative things that were said about the political system and that it was not the kind of movie that they thought they were supposed to make. Years later one of the men on the board told me this was definitely a political “X.” An “X” rating means that young people could not come into the theatre. There were officers of Gulf and Western Corporation who threatened to resign if the film was released. The compromise was that it would be released in a perfunctory way and thereby satisfy the legal requirements, keep publicity about the dispute we had private, and let it go by the boards.

## Epilogue

### Mrs Wexler and the IMAX Camera

#### **Ian Christie**

What we see in a lot of the American Direct Cinema films is a kind of media circus going on. We're very conscious in the films of Pennebaker and the Maysles of the circus of people taking photographs, recording sound interviews, being journalists, buzzing around. The process of mediation, the business of somebody presenting themselves to camera is very often what American *cinéma-vérité* are about. They're about how the presence of the camera and sound recording changes things, or creates events which otherwise wouldn't exist. At the beginning of the Sixties this buzz word went around: *cinéma-vérité*. What was at the heart of it was the realisation that film should be brought out into the open, it should actually be made visible, the act of filmmaking. So in a funny sort of way, although it appears to be about showing the truth – *cinéma-vérité* means “cinema truth” – the truth consisted of showing that something was being filmed, and in the process of being filmed it became more authentic by revealing that it was being filmed, by showing us the sound person and the cameraman and so forth in shot. And a feature of a lot of the films of this period is that they show us people being filmed.

#### **Peter Bonerz**

The end of the film is very strange. The first time I saw it I didn't know what to make of it. What? This whole thing is supposed to be about Haskell? No. If you think about it, and everyone really should think about this, it's you becoming the object of photography. The Movietone News used to do at the end of their newsreels, Fellini used it at the end of *8½*, the actor looks to the camera. Truffaut used it at the end of *The Four Hundred Blows*, the actor looks right at the camera. So in essence Haskell and all these filmmakers are saying, “This story is a story about lots of things, but essentially it's about you!”

#### **Haskell Wexler**

Many people did not like the last shot of the film. It is the most overt borrowing, or stealing, from Godard than anything else in the film. I want our audience to know that there's a machine, there's people, that everybody is in somebody's movie, that there are various levels of reality and that we're a part of it. Even though John Ketsalis in the film is photographing one reality, I am photographing him photographing that reality, and I suspect that there is somebody else, perhaps in this case my alter ego or my conscience or whatever, who is watching and making a judgement on me. It has to do with my mother. Right now as I speak to you and say my ideas, I'd like to be able to feel that my mom's watching me and saying that I'm a good boy and that I'm doing the right thing. And that she's shooting me with a 3D IMAX camera.